RETHINKING THE WESTERN TRADITION

Reflections on the Revolution in France

Edmund Burke

FRANK M. TURNER, *Editor*

Contributors

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Rethinking the Western Tradition

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Reflections on the Revolution in France

EDMUND BURKE

Edited by Frank M. Turner
with essays by
Darrin M. McMahon
Conor Cruise O'Brien
Jack N. Rakove
Alan Wolfe

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Editor's Preface

This edition of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is intended for the general reader wishing to reencounter this remarkable work or to become acquainted with it for the first time. Consequently, the scholarly apparatus within the text has been kept to a minimum. The notes are those which Burke appended, as indicated with an asterisk (*), and additional editorial notes to help the reader understand Burke's references. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of ancient texts cited in the notes are from the Loeb Classical Library, published by Harvard University Press. A Glossary-Index has been supplied to identify the numerous contemporary figures whom Burke mentions, to explain some of Burke's more archaic terms, and to permit readers to follow some of Burke's major themes.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the remarkable Victorian scholarship of E. J. Payne, who edited Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* for *Burke: Select Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886). His painstaking tracing of classical and contemporary references in Burke's volume and his more general commentary have provided the basis for virtually all subsequent editions of the *Reflections*. For a recent scholarly edition of Burke's text, with extensive critical and historical apparatus upon which future scholars will depend and from which I have much benefited and drawn, see the edition edited by J. C. D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

The text of the present edition is that printed as volume 2 of *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854) in eight volumes.

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Introduction Edmund Burke: The Political Actor Thinking

FRANK M. TURNER

Edmund Burke was born in Ireland in 1729. His mother was a Roman Catholic, and his father had conformed to the Protestant Church of Ireland to improve his personal and professional prospects. Edmund Burke attended Trinity College, Dublin, which admitted only Protestant students, and in 1750 entered the Inns of Court in London to receive legal training. His career did not lead him into the law, however, but into literature and politics. In 1756 he published *A Vindication of Natural Society,* followed the next year by *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful,* a major contribution to aesthetics. He became a close friend of the leading London men of letters.

In 1765, Burke became the private secretary to the Whig marquis of Rockingham, who served briefly as the prime minister. Through Rockingham's patronage and influence he entered Parliament the same year, remaining for most of his life associated with the Whig opposition to George III and his ministers. For a long period Burke also served as editor of the *Annual Register of the Year's Events,* a publication that covered contemporary political life. He was the colonial agent for the colony of New York and championed conciliation with the North American colonies during the years leading up to the American Revolution. In 1782, when Rockingham became first lord of the Treasury, Burke was appointed paymaster-general, a position he held under two ministries during 1782 and 1783.

In 1782 Rockingham died, and Burke had a more difficult time in politics thereafter. In the late 1780s he undertook the lead in the controversial House of Commons impeachment proceedings over Warren Hastings's maladministration of India under the authority of the East India Company. This was not a popular cause. Nor was Burke's criticism of parliamentary efforts to limit the authority of the monarchy during the

regency crisis of 1788–89.[1] Consequently, when the French Revolution commenced in 1789, Burke was neither a popular nor a powerful political figure in Parliament. He was regarded as able but eccentric and unpredictable. Had he died that year, he would be known today as a significant minor political player in the confused politics of the first half of the reign of George III.

But Burke did not die in 1789. Instead, the next year he intervened in the English debate over French events, publishing *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* a book that changed the direction not only of the English debate but also of the wider European debate. The *Reflections* itself was rapidly reprinted in Britain, and it has remained in print ever since. On the continent, French and German translations quickly found a wide readership. Burke, more than any other writer of the day, succeeded in defining for his own and later generations the character of the new political order arising in France and the danger it posed to existing British and European social and political institutions and values. In doing so, he established himself as the chief framer of modern European conservative political thought, formulating a new political stance to confront what he saw as a radical departure in European public life. Because radical political transformations would become one of the chief features not only of European but world history for more than two centuries, Burke's work established a protean analytical framework for confronting, criticizing, and evaluating revolutionary change far beyond the confines and contours of his original argument. In other words, the manner in which Burke reflected on revolution in France, as well as his particular reflections, gave his polemic staying power. When Burke died in 1797, no other writer of the era of the French Revolution had produced a work of more lasting transatlantic influence.

Burke published *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in November 1790, eighteen months after the French Estates General had gathered at Versailles in May 1789 and set off the vast revolutionary upheaval in French political and social life. During those intervening months a series of remarkable events had moved France from a divine right to a constitutional monarchy. Those events included the conversion in June 1789 of the Estates General, organized according to traditional social orders, into the National Assembly, with each member voting as an individual; the fall of the Bastille, the infamous prison associated with royal authority, to the Paris

crowds on July 14; and the eruptions of rural riots, known as the Great Fear, in the weeks thereafter.[2] In early August 1789 the nobles sitting in the National Assembly emotionally surrendered many of their traditional feudal rights. Later that month the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. In early October hundreds of Parisians, led by working women from the city, marched on Versailles and compelled Louis XVI and his family to return to Paris. To meet the demands of the government financial crisis, which had forced the calling of the Estates General for the first time since 1613, the National Assembly in late 1789 confiscated the lands of the French Roman Catholic Church and then issued bonds (*assignats*) backed by the revenue from church lands to fund the debt. The Assembly then undertook a vast reconstruction of local French administration. In July 1790 the Assembly issued the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which required clergy to take an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government and effectively turned the French church into a department of the state. Exactly a year after the fall of the Bastille Louis XVI grudgingly accepted a new constitution making him a constitutional monarch. Thus within little more than a year all the major political, administrative, and religious institutions of France had undergone radical change.

It was to those events and the English reception of them, particularly among radical political Protestant Dissenters, that Burke addressed his book. From the moment of its publication the *Reflections* caused enormous controversy and conflict, not only among radical critics such as Thomas Paine but also among those of moderately liberal Whig political conviction with whom Burke had long been allied. In his advocacy of a political philosophy vigorously defending existing institutions, Burke did not retreat from breaking longstanding friendships, splitting his own party, and deserting former political allies. Burke had been famous for his criticism of the British monarch and royal ministers, but now he suddenly became their favorite author. He was apparently abandoning so many of his previous political convictions that old friends wondered about his sanity and his integrity.

Present-day readers (not unlike his contemporaries) often find their initial response to Burke to be one of severe and not wholly unwarranted skepticism and criticism. For example, some years ago in the midst of a class discussion of the *Reflections* a very bright undergraduate remarked,

"This book is offensive, really offensive!" He was correct. To read seriously Burke's anti-revolutionary polemic is to engage with a powerful mind that offends and challenges almost every one of our most cherished modern liberal-democratic political assumptions. Burke provokes our minds, vexes our dispositions, and demands that we think and rethink much that we take for granted in our everyday political outlooks.

Burke challenges us so profoundly because he was challenging himself as well. In his *Reflections* we confront a public political actor of fundamentally liberal values forced by rapidly unfolding events to reconsider his understanding of the preconditions of political liberty. Burke was a liberal carrying out that difficult, self-imposed assignment determined that no one resist his questions, ignore his arguments, or evade his conclusions. But in the process he not only stirs us from our complacency but offends and puzzles our moral sensibilities because he claims to defend political liberty without addressing what most modern readers regard as the inherent injustices of many eighteenth-century social institutions. In fact, he asserts that by the nature of things many of those injustices cannot be significantly assuaged. Burke defended a social and political status quo that we today find largely indefensible. Yet his argument still draws us and demands our engagement.

Burke's fundamental intention is the defense and preservation of liberal political institutions against those people who would radically transform them on the basis of theory, philosophical ideas, or what would in contemporary terms be called ideology. He frames this argument as a repudiation of the siren calls of radical utopians, who would sacrifice the good inherent in existing, if imperfect and even inconsistent, political and social arrangements while vainly pursuing an elusive theoretical best, whether defined on the basis of secular ideology or religious ideals. His is the voice of the convinced liberal presenting himself as confronting a dark, dangerous, and ultimately deadly radicalism that has hijacked the vocabulary of political liberty. Consequently, Burke must repeatedly define what he regards as the genuine meaning of such liberty against new definitions that rob it of its very being. To that end he again and again advocates a politics of prudence, restraint, and moderation while warning against the politics of perfectionism. The single-minded refutation of that perfectionism—which within his polemic often includes moderate as well as radical reforms—allows Burke to reconcile himself to factors in the

social and political life of his day that seem to us deeply flawed, particularly the kinds of inequality illustrated by his defense of hereditary rights. The imperfect present becomes more or less acceptable in the face of the maddeningly destructive drive to transform it into something more nearly perfect.

To champion prudence over perfection is in and of itself a hard sell, whether in the eighteenth or twenty-first century. Burke did not make this task any easier for himself by his methods, his rhetoric, or his arguments. One element after another in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* invites us to escape Burke's argument and to elude his considerable political wisdom. An unrestrained passion infuses his pages and drives his argument while an ornate, distant, unfamiliar rhetoric interferes with the persuasiveness of his presentation—in fact, it almost blocks our access to it. Burke's pulsating emotion and the rhetorical vehemence of his assault on the political violence in France press the reader to take refuge in the very rationality he denounces. The reader, like many of Burke's contemporaries, wants to declare that things in France and its newly emerging political order really cannot be all that bad.

Even when modern readers overcome the self-isolating cast of Burke's prose, his *Reflections* still proves perplexing. How can one take seriously a political commentator who on the one hand flails away against the intellectual giants Voltaire and Rousseau and on the other presents an uncritically sentimental portrait of Marie Antoinette? How can modern readers from liberal democratic societies patiently work their way through the ideas of a writer who so condescendingly describes the French National Assembly as "viciously or feebly composed," filled with "obscure provincial advocates, . . . stewards of petty local jurisdictions, country attornies, notaries, and the whole train of the ministers of municipal litigation, the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation" and "dealers in stocks and funds," who behave "like Jew brokers, contending with each other who could best remedy with fraudulent circulation and depreciated paper the wretchedness and ruin brought on their country by their degenerate councils" (35, 36, 37, 41). How can readers who believe in separation of church and state enter into the thought of a political philosopher who demands that an established religion stand at the center of the social and political order? And how again can they take seriously that same philosopher who alongside the defense of established

religion organizes his polemical strategy around the denunciation of an English Protestant Dissenting minister who made what seems at worst a politically foolish speech before a relatively small self-selected audience? How dare we even regard Burke as a philosopher of political liberty when he demands that liberty be understood in strictly gendered terms of a "manly, moral, regulated liberty" and portrays France under the revolutionary government as a woman who "has abandoned her interest, that she might prostitute her virtue" (7, 32). It is difficult even for the most sympathetic reader not to smile with regret over Burke's praise of the nobility as a "graceful ornament to the civil order" and the "Corinthian capital of polished society" (117). Perhaps most offensive in his hostility to equality Burke forthrightly denounces what he terms "that monstrous fiction, which, by inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walk of laborious life, serves only to aggravate and imbitter that real inequality, which it can never remove; and which the order of civil life establishes as much for the benefit of those whom it must leave in an humble state, as those whom it is able to exalt to a condition more splendid, but not more happy" (32).

No, Burke does not make engagement with his thought easy, but then again neither does any great political philosopher, if taken seriously. One need only recall Plato's banishment of poets, Aristotle's defense of natural slavery, Machiavelli's advocacy of violence, and Rousseau's idea of forcing men to be free. The alternative to coming to terms with Burke is, however, to pursue a life of illusory, complacently unreflective political conviction and all too vulnerable unarticulated commitment to liberal democracy lacking a recognition of the elements of liberal thought and polity that exist in often uneasy tension. For all his emphasis on feeling, Burke demands that the political liberal think critically about liberal values and recognize that within the long tradition of Western liberal political thought there has existed considerable strain between freedom and order, between liberty and equality, between religious and racial toleration and the desire for social conformity.[3] He argues that we must recognize that no matter how much we treasure each liberal value, situations may arise in which we shall require one to trump another. Furthermore, Burke contends that, as put into practice, liberal political values require supplementary moral values, a general appreciation of social orderliness, willingness to acknowledge social hierarchy, and a temperament embracing moderation and restraint.

Not to recognize those often-difficult truths is for Burke to leave ourselves victims of sentimentality and to abandon tough political analysis.

Karl Marx, that most unsentimental of writers, surprisingly provides one avenue to recognizing the importance of Burke's critique of the revolution in France. Marx essentially, if unhappily, agreed with Burke about the power of inherited circumstances on political life. In a famous passage of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), he wrote, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[4] Whether seen as Marx's nightmare or Burke's inherited wisdom, the past realizing and asserting itself in the present could not be escaped. Marx also understood that at moments of vast political and social transformation most human beings would revert to familiar categories of understanding and analysis. Both Burke and Marx demand that new ideas and sensibilities confront radically changed circumstances. What is usually regarded as penetrating insight in Marx cannot be regarded as bigotry in Burke. In effect, Marx's comment explains the point of departure for Burke's unremitting assault on Richard Price.

Price was an English Unitarian Dissenter. As such he was a respectable and even distinguished figure in his own religious community and on the English radical political landscape. On November 4, 1789, in the Old Jewry Meeting House in London he delivered a political discourse before the Society for Commemorating the Revolution, by which was meant the English Revolution of 1688. He spoke as a radical political Protestant Dissenter addressing fellow radical political Protestant Dissenters. For many years such English Dissenters had been demanding the removal of a variety of very real religiously determined civil disabilities and advocating the cause of parliamentary reform, which they saw as the vehicle for redressing religious discrimination. Many, including Price, voiced their demands in the language of universal rights rooted in Enlightenment philosophy and rhetoric. Consequently, in their political agenda the language of political radicalism and religious liberty had become conflated. Furthermore, because English Unitarians had emerged as the leading political spokesmen among Protestant Dissenters, political radicalism had become linked to religious heterodoxy.

Price thus discussed the events in France through the standard, indeed virtually traditional, categories of the politically engaged Protestant Dissenter whose own denomination was identified with rational religion. Long determined to expand religious and political liberty in England, he looked opportunistically to the French Revolution as an occasion to voice political complaints and aspirations for radical reform in Britain, much as he and other Dissenters had viewed the American Revolution. At one point in his discourse, Price declared,

> What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to see it; and I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error—I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever; and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it.—I have lived to see Thirty Millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.—After sharing in the benefits of one Revolution, I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious.—And now, methinks, I see the ardour for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience.[5]

In this exuberant passage Price drew into a single line of descent the English Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution, and the immediate turmoil in France. Shortly before he spoke, that last upheaval had momentarily culminated with the crowd of Parisians marching on Versailles, milling around the palace overnight, and then forcing King Louis XVI, Queen Marie Antoinette, and their children to return to Paris—the event that Burke and others believed Price extolled as "their king led in triumph and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects."[6] Moreover, as a rational Protestant speaking to a rational Protestant audience, Price had no difficulty commending the assault that had already occurred on the property of the French Roman Catholic Church as the "dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience." In all of these comments Price embodied the British Enlightenment with its peculiar combination of political liberalism, rational religion, and anti-Catholicism.

Price, whose discourse had elicited hostile replies before Burke's, was not badly intentioned, but he was exceptionally naïve. He was, of course, not alone in such naïveté. Across Europe numerous commentators swept up in the enthusiasm of the early revolution praised its events. Many later

academic historians would effectively follow Price and his contemporaries in their general approval of the French Revolution, downplaying or even approving its destructiveness, anticlericalism, property confiscation, state violence against French citizens, and ultimate military despotism. This view would prevail so effectively that as late as the close of the twentieth century the gifted historian Simon Schama could write a narrative history of the French Revolution that became spectacularly successful largely by recognizing the revolutionary violence and noting that a good time had not been had by all.[7] Resistance to recognition of the fate of the Roman Catholic Church in France, the later reign of terror, the absence of law and due process, and the final Napoleonic military dictatorship has been essential to resistance to Burke's analysis and arguments regarding the French Revolution.

Embracing within his own utopian vision the French Revolution, Price in late 1789 ignored its already present urban and rural violence and implicitly approved the confiscation of ecclesiastical land. In his self-appointed role of championing events in France, Price was the forerunner of so many later, otherwise peaceful, even personally timid, intellectuals in the West who from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution to the revolutionary disturbances in the former colonial world to the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, would voice support for violence and terror or demand that it be "understood" as somehow justified or even deserved in the larger order of things. To be fair, Price had much more excuse than his latter-day emulators. Moreover, beyond his immediate political concerns Price analyzed contemporary political transformations within the framework of a Christian millennialism that interpreted what its adherents considered to be progressive political movements as leading to the second coming of Jesus Christ. In that respect Price was both a political and a religious utopian visionary, though to be sure a person more moderate in behavior than in rhetoric.

Burke, by contrast, was almost from the beginning skeptical, if not yet actively hostile, toward events in France. As early as August 1789 he wrote of "our astonishment at the wonderful Spectacle which is exhibited in a Neighbouring and rival Country" and which displayed "something in it paradoxical and Mysterious." He was initially uncertain whether the explosion of the "old Parisian ferocity" would prove temporary or point to permanent change. If the latter, he thought the French "not fit for Liberty"

and requiring "a Strong hand like that of their former masters to coerce them." In this same context he noted, "Men must have a certain fund of natural moderation to qualify them for Freedom, else it become noxious to themselves and a perfect Nuisance to every body else."[8] Burke stood convinced that a temperament of moderation must exist before political liberty could be secured rather than expecting such moderation to emerge from the exercise of social and administrative confusion wrongly termed liberty. It did not take him long to conclude that the revolution in France would end badly for both that country and others as well. He was particularly convinced that such would be the case if the ideas and ideals of the new French government were transported to Britain as Price advocated in his address.

It is not at all easy to appreciate the act of political imagination required on Burke's part to see the French turmoil as something genuinely and destructively new on the European political scene. Across the continent the politics and social life of the second half of the eighteenth century had involved a good deal of domestic violence and tumult. In this respect there were many precedents for the individual elements of political activity occurring in the early months of what would soon be called the French Revolution, particularly precedents for efforts at aristocratic constitutional innovation limiting monarchical authority, for public rioting, for peasant uprisings, and for anticlericalism. Burke himself had been one of the foremost critics of the authority and patronage of the British monarchy. During the 1760s Britain had witnessed public riots of a distinctly political character over the seating of John Wilkes in Parliament, and in the late 1770s a much-expanded public politics in the Yorkshire Association Movement for parliamentary reform. Religion had also provided a subject for public disruption and resistance. In 1780 London had been devastated by the anti-Catholic Gordon riots, which resulted in several hundred deaths. Across Europe popular urban riots sparked by bread and food prices, as two generations of social historians have now demonstrated, were part and parcel of eighteenth-century European political life. To some the disturbances surrounding the fall of the Bastille looked like one more such riot. At the other end of the political spectrum Joseph II of Austria and Catherine the Great of Russia had used state power to confiscate church lands and to demand greater accountability from the church toward those over whom it ministered, thus setting precedents for the ecclesiastical

actions of the French National Assembly. Furthermore, many European observers, including Burke, had regarded the social tensions in France as more embittered than elsewhere on the continent and as likely to lead to severe difficulties. Consequently, one can sympathize with the plight of European politicians and political commentators who throughout 1789 and 1790 attempted to bring into focus the events in France through existing categories for comprehending contemporary political behavior.

Burke, earlier than most, understood differently the situation unfolding in France. He did so in part because he had for so long been a critic of English political life, but a critic who knew bounds. As demonstrated by his momentous defense of the presence of parties in English political life, he did not shrink from debate and sharp criticism. But offering criticism was different from overturning the political and social order. Burke had denounced business as usual in English politics, the authority of an overreaching monarchy, and the ambitions of a self-perpetuating aristocracy not in order to reject those institutions but to redirect them toward different policies and new inclusiveness. He had never wanted to upset the political apple cart; he had wanted to influence its direction. From his own experience Burke recognized the difference between the reformer, no matter how outspoken, and the radical, no matter how rational.

Burke was also familiar with the details of government and administration in which for his entire political career he had immersed himself. His position as agent for the American colony of New York, his dissection of the civil lists of the British monarchy, and his crusade against Warren Hastings's maladministration in India prepared him to understand the implications of the wholesale administrative changes being undertaken in France. He understood that the devil resided not only in the details of administration but, more important, in ignoring those administrative details.

Just as the Gordon Riots had convinced Burke of the dangers of mob violence and anti-Catholicism, his political experiences in the decade just prior to the publication of his *Reflections,* when he had found himself politically isolated, had made him skeptical of the motivations of parliamentary politicians. Parliamentary resistance to what he saw as overwhelming moral improprieties in the behavior of Warren Hastings in India made him doubt whether parliamentary legislators could provide for a moral empire. The debates of 1788 and 1789 over the regency necessitated by the mental illness of George III raised suspicions in his mind about the

ambitions of parliamentary leaders who he thought improperly attempted to supplant the monarch's authority for their own partisan ends. He carried all of these doubts and hard-won skepticism to his analysis of the politicians in the French National Assembly and of the limitations he saw them imposing on Louis XVI.

Second, Burke, as an Irish outsider eager to be admitted to the corridors of English power, had a deep sensitivity to the exercise of arbitrary authority. He knew that political and social authority, especially when undergirded by ideas, had the capacity to destroy and distort lives. He had seen personally the impact of the English anti-Catholic penal laws in Ireland. There, in the history of that nation and in the experience of his own family, especially in his father's conversion to the Protestant Church of Ireland, he had experienced a political regime that self-consciously ignored the customs, manners, and religion of a people for the sake of imposing its own religious ideas, values, and ambitions. The English ideological championing of Protestantism in Ireland had meant the ongoing degradation of the Irish Roman Catholic majority, and Burke saw a similar situation beginning to unfold in France. There were also parallels in France to the contempt for local social and religious values that Burke had previously seen in Warren Hastings's misgovernment of India.

Third, from the Irish experience and from having lived through the Gordon Riots, Burke knew the powerfully destructive force of anti-Catholicism. He loathed and distrusted it, whether manifested in the rational religion of the Enlightenment or in the bigotry of Puritan Protestants. This recognition is one of the sources of his frequent and, to many readers, surprising equation of the Enlightenment and Protestantism, though, as Darrin M. McMahon argues later in this volume, there were others.

English Protestants, including the most liberal, rational, and otherwise moderate figures, considered Roman Catholicism to be a foreboding, superstitious other to which neither charity nor toleration should be extended. Within this outlook liberal English Protestants overlapped French anti-clerical *philosophes,* such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Helvetius—Burke's "literary caballers and intriguing philosophers" (10)—with whom otherwise they had little in common. In turn, both the liberal English Protestants and the philosophes shared the anticlerical outlooks that had allowed the monarchies of Eastern Europe to move arbitrarily against the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in their domains.

Consequently, in the early policies of the French revolutionary government toward the French Roman Catholic Church and its property, Burke saw embodied three destructive political tendencies—bigotry, anticlericalism, and arbitrary government. From his standpoint the policies of the revolutionary French government toward the French Roman Catholic Church differed little from the policy of the English government toward Roman Catholicism in Ireland. The one had and the other would produce political tyranny and human degradation all in the name of rationality.

Finally, Burke was not only a person of political life and ambition. He was also a man of letters and one of the foremost writers of the age on aesthetics. He understood from the study of history and literature, the observation of art, and the exploration of his own personality that human nature is not coextensive with rationality. He stands in the tradition of the great skeptics from Montaigne to Pascal to Hume. Although rightly identified as a critic of the Enlightenment—indeed, through his criticism almost its conceptual inventor—Burke was also in reality a student of the deeper Enlightenment that understood the complexity of human action and the inability to reduce human nature to the embodiment of reason alone. Having absorbed so much of Enlightenment pessimism and doubt about the capacity of human reason to address the human situation or guide human events, Burke would have agreed with D'Alembert in the *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopedia:* "Barbarism lasts for centuries; it seems that it is our natural element; reason and good taste are only passing."[9] It was because Burke was so much a man of the Enlightenment that he could so deeply and passionately condemn its distortion into the heady utopianism of the revolutionary era. In this as in so many elements of the *Reflections,* the reader stands witness to a lovers' quarrel.

What Burke grasped, and the hapless Price did not, was that the events in France, whether urban and rural violence or new constitutional departures or confiscation of ecclesiastical property, could not be domesticated onto either the English or the larger European political landscape. They marked a new departure in things political not only for France but for Europe. As he wrote in 1791, "The present revolution in France seems to me to be quite of another character and description; and to bear little resemblance or analogy to any of those which have been brought about in Europe, upon principles merely political. *It is a revolution of doctrine and theoretic dogma*. It has a much greater resemblance to those

changes which have been made upon religious grounds, in which the spirit of proselytism makes an essential part."[10] It had been the example of Price's having succumbed to the proselytism of the French ideology and then having prescribed it for England that had stirred Burke to write, and to write with such intensity. From his standpoint Price's sermon demonstrated that within months of its outbreak the ideas of the French Revolution had begun to jump over political boundaries.

When the new French constitutionalism—which was based on the ideology of the rights of man reaching from the highest to the most minute units of the nation—combined with urban rioting, agrarian unrest, a wholesale reorganization of the church and confiscation of its property, and a direct assault on the king and queen, anything even resembling often disruptive eighteenth-century politics overran its channels. Each of these distinct events reinforced and magnified the impact of the others. To be sure, as Timothy Tackett had eloquently argued, there may have been nothing inevitable in the failure of the constitutional monarchy structured by the National Assembly, but Burke foresaw that once so many different factors came into play, contingency itself was in the ascendant.[11] Under such conditions he believed that one tumultuous event would give rise to another because so many former safeguards against widespread and destructive change were removed. As he wrote in another, later attack on the French Revolution, "The world of contingency and political combination is much wider than we are apt to imagine."[12]

Events proved Burke correct, but the enduring power of his analysis of revolutionary change—change such as Europe had not witnessed since the Reformation—does not lie in the success of his predictions. It resides rather in the conceptual structure of his argument against the French Revolution. Burke's argument achieved lasting authority because even though he directed it against the revolution in France, he shaped it as a more general criticism of arbitrary political power informed by a zeal for ideas that over the course of the next two centuries would assume many different guises. The French Revolution for Burke thus represented a vast particular manifestation of a potentially still more vast and general political danger. In that regard Burke was genuinely *reflecting* on the revolution in France and not simply *reacting* to it. It is his reflection, not his reaction, that has given his book its perennial relevance.

Burke equated the revolution being carried out in France through the National Assembly with a self-consciously arbitrary and tyrannical rejection of experience, tradition, historical precedent, religion, and natural social hierarchy that emerged from destructively rationalistic writings of the Enlightenment philosophes. In turn he directly associated this radical rationalism, which he projected onto the minds of the revolutionaries, with the mechanical philosophy that had undergirded European science and natural knowledge, as well as much philosophy, since the middle of the seventeenth century. This mode of framing the events and sources of the French Revolution proved enormously influential in Britain and across the continent. After Burke, many conservative political polemicists as well as less engaged commentators simply assumed that the Enlightenment had embodied mechanistic thought, reductionist materialism, vehement anti-clericalism, and a mindless rationalism that ignored the deeper elements of human nature and over time fostered political upheaval leading to an absence of restraint on political authority. Only in the middle of the twentieth century would intellectual historians directly challenge those assumptions about the Enlightenment.[13]

There is, however, a generally unrecognized paradox in Burke's lasting, influential attack on the mechanical philosophy of nature and his equation of it with radical politics, extreme rationalism, materialism, and atheism. The mechanical philosophy associated with Newtonian science and with the experimental philosophy of Robert Boyle arose in seventeenth-century England in direct opposition to the French philosophy of science forged by René Descartes, whom Newton and his English contemporaries rightly or wrongly regarded as both materialistic and atheistic. Throughout the eighteenth century the mechanical, experimental approach to science—widely denoted as Newtonianism and popularized both by English writers and by Voltaire in his *Letters on England* (1733)—embraced theism, toleration, and moderate political liberty. Furthermore, it was seen as one of the underpinnings of English political stability. Except in the minds of a few late-century French authors, the mechanical philosophy had been anything but the materialistic vision of human and physical nature that Burke ascribed to the term. Nor had the mechanical philosophy been associated with political tyranny. This confusion and conflation on Burke's part constitute a problem in his thought requiring a solution.

That solution lies in the double impact of seventeenth-century English political experience on Burke's thinking. First, much of Burke's prescience about the character and course of the French Revolution stemmed directly from his understanding of the events of the English Civil War. There a radical political ideology infused with Protestant Puritan theology had overturned the monarchy, Parliament, and the English Church. These seventeenth-century parallels to events in late eighteenth-century France explain Burke's understanding of political revolution shaped and driven by ideas overturning ancient political and religious institutions. In the French context the Enlightenment philosophes, whose thought informs the destructively radical National Assembly, play the part of the zealously radical Puritans. In the late-eighteenth-century English context Price personifies a latter-day Puritan zealot whose ideas, if actually carried out, would result in a modern English revolution replicating that of the mid-seventeenth century. The philosophes in France and the Prices in Britain provided the corrosive criticism undermining faith and confidence in the status quo. Moreover, Burke's prediction of the inevitable coming of military despotism to France also had its forerunner in the English Civil War when the short-lived Puritan Republic gave way to a military regime and the eventual arbitrary rule of Oliver Cromwell.

While the pattern of the English Civil War accounted in part for the manner in which Burke framed his understanding of the revolution in France, a second, unnamed seventeenth-century political presence must also have filled his mind when he denounced the application of rationalistic, atheistic, mechanical philosophy to politics as resulting in despotism. That presence, not specifically noted in the *Reflections,* was the specter of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). What Burke deplored in his particular characterization of the policies of the new French government was their embodiment of the absolutist state about which Hobbes had theorized. Throughout his public and private writings Burke makes almost no references to Hobbes. Yet in *Leviathan* Hobbes had projected an all-powerful state created on the bases of rational analysis, a mechanistically materialistic philosophy of nature, the rejection of history and tradition, the repudiation of practical experience, and explicit anticlericalism. What Burke attacked in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was a novel political regime across the channel that he portrayed as having realized the unrestrained Hobbesian state.

Only Hobbes among previous English political philosophers had articulated a thoroughly rational, mechanical philosophy of politics, and he had done so to defend the concept of an all-powerful sovereign. Hobbes had generated his sovereign through a geometric analysis of human nature and human social psychology whereby he defined his own terms for his own purposes, rejecting the touchstone of experience, history, and Aristotelian scholastic philosophy. Repudiating both natural law and common law, Hobbes argued that no law existed prior to the contract establishing his political sovereign, whose commands constitute the only law that Hobbes recognizes as valid. In that respect the legal framework for society represented a blank slate, and the new sovereign created that framework after his subjects agreed to the contract assigning authority to the sovereign. For all intents and purposes Hobbes permitted no appeal from decisions of the sovereign, nor significant guaranteed due process. Furthermore, throughout the latter half of *Leviathan* Hobbes makes clear that one motive deeply informing his political philosophy was the eradication of religion, especially Roman Catholicism, as a center of political and cultural authority capable of challenging and undermining the authority of the state.

The character of political authority that Burke projected upon the revolutionary French government and then systematically denounced was exactly the kind of authority that Hobbes had claimed for his sovereign. This construction on Burke's part is what accounts for the perennial power of his thought. He was not attacking the momentary politics and policies of the French Revolution but rather the larger despotic Hobbesian political vision based on rationality, mechanism, materialism, and anticlericalism. It was Hobbes, like the members of the French National Assembly after him, who had thought he could construct a state in disregard of the generations of human experience and religious faith and practice that had preceded him. Of all the political "men of theory" (35) so distrusted by Burke, Hobbes was the greatest.

From the moment of its publication commentators had heaped accusations of materialism, atheism, mechanism, and tyranny on Hobbes's *Leviathan* and on the obvious intellectual arrogance that informed it. As a result of those critiques, by the middle of the eighteenth century David Hume could conclude, "Hobbes's politics are fitted only to promote tyranny, and his ethics to encourage licentiousness. Though an enemy to religion, he partakes nothing of the spirit of scepticism; but is as positive

and dogmatical as if human reason, and his reason in particular, could attain a thorough conviction in these subjects."[14] From the comments of Hume and others Burke could assume that Hobbes's dogmatic philosophy had been effectively repulsed. Indeed, Burke did in 1765 state that Hobbes had been ably refuted during the previous century.[15] Thus to the extent that Burke could frame the revolution in France as a realization of Hobbesian politics, he could critique it on the same grounds that Hobbes so far as the eighteenth century was concerned had been thoroughly refuted. Virtually no writer of the Enlightenment actually resembled Hobbes, but Burke caricatured and castigated the philosophes as if they were Hobbesians or as if their thought necessarily led to Hobbesian conclusions.

It is significant that Burke's assault on the ideas he presents as informing the revolution in France echoes one of Hobbes's most articulate seventeenth-century critics—Bishop John Bramhall of the Church of Ireland. Although there is no direct evidence that he drew upon Bramhall, it is certainly possible that as a young Irishman studying at Trinity College, Dublin, Burke might have read Bramhall's critique of Hobbes. From such study he could easily have concluded that Hobbes and his tyrannical politics of rational reductionism had been effectively defeated.

In a work of 1658 provocatively entitled "The Catching of Leviathan, or the Great Whale," Bramhall criticized Hobbes's entire materialist metaphysics and his theory of society based on self-preservation as antithetical to a proper understanding of both God and man. Bramhall accused Hobbes of having "devised for us a trimne Commonwealth, which is neither founded upon religion towards God, nor justice towards man, but merely upon self interest, and self preservation."[16] Bramhall found Hobbes's proposed formation of a government without reference to religion deeply wanting. For Bramhall, because of the presence of "raies of heavenly light, those natural seeds of religion which God himself hath imprinted in the heart of man," it naturally followed that "without religion, Societies are but like soapy bubbles, quickly dissolved."[17] In parallel with Bramhall's thought, Burke would claim, "We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort. . . . We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long" (77). Furthermore, just as Burke believed laws of society and behavior predated the

government and that government was part of a larger eternal contract, Bramhall affirmed, "Adam had a law written in his heart by the finger of God, before there was any civil law." Those who along with Hobbes would project a state, politics, and law without reference to divine things thereby "endeavour to make goodnesse, and justice, and honesty, and conscience, and God himself, to be empty names without any reality, which signifie nothing, further than they conduce to a mans [*sic*] interest."[18]

Bramhall also equated the concept of Hobbesian sovereignty whereby the sovereign alone determined what was and was not law with ancient sophistry, the same accusation Burke leveled against the French Revolution. In this regard Bramhall stated that according to Hobbes, "*What the law-giver commands is to be accounted good, what he forbids bad*. This was just the garb of the Athenian Sophisters, as described by Plato. Whatsoever pleased the great beast [the multitude] they called holy, and just, and good. And whatsoever the great beast disliked, they called evill, unjust, prophane."[19] Burke saw the revolutionary government in France carrying out the same nihilistic project of defining and redefining terms to their own selfish ends as "politicians of metaphysics . . . have opened schools for sophistry and made establishments for anarchy" (190). As portrayed in ancient political philosophy and history, democracies guided through leaders educated by the shallow but ambitious sophists, like the sovereign projected in *Leviathan,* embodied will unrestrained by law, ethics, religion, or tradition. Such was exactly Burke's image of the French Revolution in 1790, and it would become even more his view as time passed. It was on the basis of those longstanding critiques of the ancient sophists and Greek democracy upon which Bramhall and others had drawn before him that Burke would declare, "A perfect democracy is . . . the most shameless thing in the world. As it is the most shameless, it is also the most fearless" (80).

As fundamental to Bramhall's attack on Hobbes as it was to Burke's on the revolution in France was the denunciation of geometric and mechanical political reasoning that made no reference to experience or concrete circumstance. For Bramhall such a priori reasoning undergirded all Hobbes's faults. Bramhall in his critique of Hobbes, like Burke after him, determinedly emphasized the necessity of an appeal to experience in politics:

> State policy, which is wholly involved in matter, and circumstances of time, and place, and persons, is not at all like *Arithmetick and Geometry,* which are altogether abstracted from matter, but much more like *Tennis-play*. There is no place for liberty in Arithmetick and Geometry, but in policy there is, and so there is in Tennis-play. A game at Tennis hath its vicissitudes, and so have States. A Tennis plaier must change his play at every stroke, according to the occasion and accidents: so must a Statesman move his rudder differently, according to the various faces of heaven. He who manageth a Common-wealth by general rules, will quickly ruine both himself, and those who are committed to his government. . . . In summe, general rules are easie, and signifie not much in policy. The quintessence of policy doth consist in the dexterous and skilful application of those rules to the subject matter.[20]

Bramall repeatedly denigrated Hobbes's refusal to look at political life as something necessarily drawing on purposeful experience, declaring: "Experience the Mistrisse of fooles, is the best, and almost the onely proof of the goodnesse or badnesse of any form of government. No man knoweth where a shooe wringeth, so well as he that weareth it. A new Physitian must have a new Church-yard, wherein to bury those whom he killeth. And a new unexperienced Politician, commonly putteth all into a combustion."[21] Such is exactly the spirit that informs Burke's long, specific criticisms of the new French political and administrative arrangements that fill the second half of *Reflections*.

Time after time Burke brings the same accusation of the ignoring of experience against the novel departures in France. He saw the policies and outlooks of the revolution bursting the boundaries of all existing institutions and setting out in untried and therefore distinctly dangerous directions. For Burke, resisting the temptation to construct a society from the ground up on the basis of untested rationality was the beginning of political wisdom and the essence of political prudence. The leaders of the new French government had fallen prey to that temptation, with the result that, as Burke told a correspondent in 1791, the French Revolution "is a *revolt of innovation,* and thereby the very elements of Society have been confounded and dissipated."[22]

Burke argued that the most radical and destructive features of the French revolutionaries stemmed from their reliance upon theory rather than upon experience and pragmatic goals to shape and justify policies. He had long generally opposed "*Visionary* Politicians," who suggested schemes of radical change in the British electoral system based on what he regarded as first principles rather than on an appreciation for history and circumstances.[23] He associated visionary politics with the imposition of

innovations that failed to take into account the concrete details of political and social life. Indeed in his opinion the imposition of administrative innovation upon the North American colonies had been one of the causes of the American Revolution. Burke believed that political decisions should be made in terms of reference to concrete circumstance that would inherently restrain the political actor in a fashion that an open-ended theory would not. At one point in the *Reflections* he declared,

> I cannot conceive how any man can have brought himself to that pitch of presumption, to consider his country as nothing but *carte blanche,* upon which he may scribble whatever he pleases. A man full of warm, speculative benevolence may wish his society otherwise constituted than he finds it, but a good patriot, and a true politician, always considers how he shall make the most of the existing materials of his country. A disposition to preserve and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. Everything else is vulgar in the conception, perilous in the execution. (133)

Burke embraced an "ability to improve" on the part of the wise statesman. But to see one's country as a blank space open to any manner of political scribbling was to permit the exercise of the most extreme modes of tyranny —tyranny to which no significant or principled resistance was possible. It was just this lesson that the Irish had so painfully learned. Undoubtedly with the Irish precedent in mind he declared, "It is impossible not to observe that, in the spirit of this geometrical distribution and arithmetical arrangement, these pretended citizens treat France exactly like a country of conquest" (155). For a government to abandon any one set of prescriptive rights opened the path to abandoning any and all prescriptive rights. Such had been the direction of the policies of the French Revolution, the behavior of Warren Hastings, the seventeenth-century Cromwellian Puritan commonwealth, and the vision of Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

Within the *Reflections* Burke worked through this issue with particular regard to the property rights of the French Catholic Church. As John Pocock has so ably argued, Burke saw the French government undertaking a disastrous policy of flooding the nation with paper money backed in theory by the confiscated church lands.[24] A double robbery had resulted: the church lost land and the bondholders received worthless paper. It is important, however, to see why Burke regarded the confiscation of the property of the French Church by the National Assembly as such a heinous act. In 1793 he told a correspondent, "It is the contempt of Property, and the setting up against its principle, certain pretended advantages of the State, (which by

the way exists only for its conservation) that has led to all the other Evils which have ruined France, and brought all Europe into the most imminent danger. The beginning of the whole mischief was a false Idea, that there is a difference in property according to the description of the persons who hold it under the Laws, and that the despoiling a Minister of Religion is not the same Robbery with the Pillage of other Men."[25] Burke was convinced that once a government had confiscated one form of property, in this case that of the French Church, for ill-defined national purposes there would in principle exist no possibility of restraint against other confiscation. Through the confiscation of ecclesiastical property Burke saw the French Revolution as having subverted "that order of things under which our part of the world has so long flourished, and indeed been in a progressive State of improvement, the Limits of which, if it had not been thus rudely stopped, it would not have been easy for the imagination to fix."[26] The French government had begun to tread a path of the most profound kind of public corruption. What the revolution by its example had demonstrated "for the first time in the History of the world" was "that it is very possible to subvert the whole Frame and order of the best constructed States by corrupting the common people with the Spoil of the superior Classes."[27] A democracy that allowed one mode of confiscation would quickly approve others, and all longstanding social arrangements would collapse.

Burke's premise that government exists to conserve property echoes John Locke, though perhaps not on Lockean principles, as well as virtually all other eighteenth-century British political philosophers, and also states one of the fundamental principles of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal politics. A government confiscating property stood in contradiction to the most basic purpose of government. A government that failed to protect property in goods or persons could not and presumably would not protect other rights, because property was regarded as including one's person as well as one's goods. If a government moved arbitrarily to deprive of its property a particular group of persons or a particular corporate institution, such as the church, there would in principle be no end of the matter. Bad political actors could always find good reasons for evil behavior. The real problem for Burke was the evil inherent in human passion as much as the wrongs associated with any particular policy. At one point he urged,

> History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites, which shake the public with the same
>
> > —troublous storms that toss
> > The private state, and render life unsweet.
>
> These vices are the *causes* of those storms. Religion, morals, laws, prerogatives, privileges, liberties, rights of men are the *pretexts*. The pretexts are always found in some specious appearance of a real good. (119)

Burke never doubted that in the realm of politics and power human beings would devise one apparently good pretext after another to justify deeds that harmed both individuals and the collective society. Like Hume before him, Burke understood that reason is the slave of the passions.

There is much less of a specifically antidemocratic impetus to Burke's view of the sacredness of property than might first appear in the pages of the *Reflections*. The behavior of the French National Assembly was the problem at hand, but Burke believed that *any unrestrained* government, whether a democracy or an over-powerful monarchy, could destroy a society through illicit confiscation of property. Such confiscation had been the mark of earlier tyrannical European governments—and most of those were monarchies—from at least the opening of the sixteenth century. Much as he opposed the policies of the new French regime, Burke was no less deeply skeptical of the policies of the absolutist monarchs of Eastern Europe on exactly the same grounds of their disregard for private property. They had after all confiscated ecclesiastical lands in their own realms well before the rise of the revolutionary French government. Less than a year after the publication of the *Reflections* Burke told his son, "The Truth is, I am afraid, that the Emperor [Leopold II] and some of his Ministers though he does not approve; (as he cannot approve) of the destruction of the monarchy, is infinitely pleased with the Robbery of the Church property and the humiliation of the Gentry [in France]; and that in that lust of philosophick spoliation, and equalization, he forgets that he cuts down the supports of Monarchy, and indeed destroys those principles of property, order and regularity for which alone any rational man can wish Monarchy to exist."[28] For Burke, the elites of any nation as well as others lower in the social scale supported monarchical government not on the grounds of its sacredness but because it preserved property.

In the same letter Burke declared that as much as he detested all that had occurred in France, he could "not actively, or with a good heart, and clear conscience, go to the establishment of a monarchical despotism in the place of this system of Anarchy."[29] Burke then briefly outlined his own list of not inconsiderable or insignificant reforms for a French monarchy restored to a position of authority more nearly like that prior to the early summer of 1789. For Burke those reforms included the abolition of letters of Cachet and other modes of arbitrary imprisonment, taxation through an elected Estates General in consultation with the monarchy, restoration of public credit, and creation of a synod governing the Gallican Church. Moreover, everyone participating in government, including the monarch, should swear a declaration in support of such arrangements. These were clearly the sentiments of a prudent reformer, not a blind reactionary.

Burke, moreover, would have been among the last to defend *the manner* in which the existing property arrangements in any particular society had come into being. He fully recognized that both violence and unfairness had been part and parcel of the process. Yet he was not one to believe that in any single present generation all or even most past wrongs could or should be set aright unless the immediate and lasting benefits of such compensation far outweighed the difficulties likely to be incurred. Significant transformation or readjustment of property arrangements would in all likelihood breed instability and probable injustice worse, in Burke's view, than what he saw as the ancient injustices associated with the acquisition of property. In all these respects, he distinctly and consciously rejected the politics of perfection and instead explicitly embraced a politics of admitted imperfection. Indeed, he forthrightly stated, "The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil" (52).

The pursuit of a theoretical or abstract politics that Burke saw at work in regard to church lands would also in his view effectively lead not only to social upheaval but also to political and moral nihilism. As previously noted, Burke, like most English writers, understood one's own personhood and body to be a mode of property and thus considered that what had begun as confiscation of church lands could end in the deprivation of citizens' lives by the revolutionary state. Nowhere in the *Reflections* did he more strikingly or controversially make that point than in the famous—or, for

some, infamous—passage about Marie Antoinette. There Burke recalled the French queen as he had seen her when she was about twenty. At the conclusion of his description, he declared, "But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever" (65). Upon reading a draft of this passage one of Burke's close friends accused him of composing lines that amounted to nothing less than "pure foppery."[30] Furious at the comment, which ended the friendship, Burke replied, "It is for those who applaud or palliate assassination, regicide, and base insults to Women of illustrious place, to prove the Crimes in the sufferers which they allege to justifye their own."[31] Since that time the judgment of Burke's emotional rhetoric has depended upon longstanding, largely unexamined hostility toward Marie Antoinette, who did, of course, meet her death by judicial execution, an event rarely decried even by modern liberal opponents of capital punishment or defenders of women's rights.

To allow oneself, however, to become distracted by considerations of the alleged moral failures of Marie Antoinette, about which the biographer Antonia Fraser has raised considerable doubt, is to ignore Burke's larger argument.[32] He believed that what was at stake in the degradation of the French queen by the Paris crowd in October 1789 had involved something else—a "revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions" (69). Burke, like so many other eighteenth-century writers, including Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, believed that manners and morals predated and provided contours for political structures and social expectations that could both mitigate the necessity of certain political authority and curb its excessive exercise. The alternative to the exercise of personal restraint through manners and morals was the increase of formal repression on the part of the state.

Furthermore, for more than a century the ideals and values of the *honnête homme* in France and the rise of respectability throughout northwestern Europe and Britain had brought new modes of self-restraint to everyday life.[33] The power of manners and morals often associated with the recent expansion of consumption and the values of a consumer society as well as with the more traditional structures of aristocratic inheritance and *politesse* had become very powerful forces. In thus appealing to manners and morals and "the spirit of a gentleman" (67) Burke was not indulging some kind of effete rhetoric but appealing both to the traditional view of

gentility associated with inherited wealth and title and to a more recently emerging and expanding social reality of respectability that could make less necessary the exercise of policing authority by the state. Both of these stood abandoned in the violence of the revolution.

In reflecting on the aftermath of the humiliation of the royal family, Burke, in a passage that as Paul Fussell once noted owes much to Swift's description of a naked Gulliver discovering his resemblance to the vicious Yahoos, declared,[34]

> But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimate, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. (66)

If the influence of manners and morals were removed by critical rationality, then there will be little left to restrain human actions toward violence because the spirit of restraint that Burke associated with the spirit of the gentleman would along with learning be "cast into the mire and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" (68). Harsh and distasteful as that last notorious phrase may be, it did come from the pen of an author who had personally witnessed the Gordon Riots and read in detail of the French urban riots and rural uprisings that during 1789 had involved mutilation of the bodies of the victims of crowd violence.[35]

The multitude in Burke's view was not inherently swinish, but became so when all the informal restraints of prescriptive social practice and deferential expectations were removed or dissolved. If manners and morals with all their salutary illusions did not partially restrict human behavior, then that behavior would become swinish and destructive, eventually calling forth the violently repressive force of the state. At the end of the day Burke knew that coercion lies behind all government but that the degree of visible, direct, formal coercion or policing depends upon the extent to which other nonpolitical values, manners, morals, and institutions support orderly life.

Yet even in this remarkable passage regretting the dissolution of shared social expectations, one could still insist that Burke was simply indulging

the sentimental deference of a young provincial Irishman beguiled by the beauties of that royal and aristocratic culture he had witnessed in the garden of Versailles. Modern bemusement at royal privilege and contempt for social inequality come to the fore to resist the direction in which Burke is leading us. But unless we actually stop reading, he will not let us escape the conclusion of his analysis:

> On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly. Regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father are only common homicide; and if the people are by any chance, or in any way, gainers by it a sort of homicide much the more pardonable, and into which we ought not to make too severe a scrutiny. (66)

On the basis of "this barbarous philosophy," Burke continued, "laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests" (66). The result of the "principles of this mechanic philosophy" would be the banishment of those "public affections, combined with manners" that "are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law" (66). Once those supplements were removed Burke was convinced that the same kind of untrammeled power that had destroyed them would attempt to govern without restraint.

In considering Burke's passages on manners and morals, which have made so many people uncomfortable or angry, the reader must reach beyond the florid language to think carefully about the social presuppositions of an orderly society and a society whose order benefits not only its more prosperous citizens but also its most humble. The reader must rise above the residual, lingering inner adolescent resentment against parental injunctions to behave well to recognize that good and decent behavior is part and parcel of peaceful life and mutually beneficial civil restraint. If manners and morals do not restrain, then human society will very much resemble Hobbes's state of nature in which all are at war with all. Then the political response may be the Hobbesian sovereign that simply represses without reference to any restraints outside its own absolute authority.

Burke, whether the reader likes his rhetoric or not, had presciently outlined the exact character of the mode of political tyranny that from his own day to the present could be unleashed by stripping individual human beings of all their social characteristics and reducing them to some abstract enemy of the state or society or to something less than human. He also, however, understood that manners and morals not only keep the lower orders in subservience to their social superiors but no less certainly protect the poor and humble against each other. He would not have been surprised at the resurgence of local village violence against Jewish neighbors in parts of Eastern Europe during World War II when all of the restraint of custom and daily decencies dissolved.[36] Burke understood that the ideology of the natural rights of man could protect no one from either the state or their neighbors without the supplementary restraint of manners and morals and, he would no doubt also have added, of religion.

The value of Burke's analysis, to repeat, does not really lie in what many from the 1790s onward have regarded as its prophetic insights into the eventual judicial murder of the French royal family, further terror against French citizens from all social classes, the drive toward dechristianization, and the rise of a military dictatorship. The lasting command of Burke's polemic is his recognition that the appeal to visionary political goals in the name of the rights of man or another political or religious ideology must necessarily result not in justice but in destruction and death, because rational utopians under the banner of light and reason would define and redefine political terms and social categories to advance their own tyrannical aims. It is exactly that essentially unrestrained power to proclaim law and to define its interpretation that Hobbes assigned to his sovereign and that Burke saw at work in the France of his own day. Burke believed that revolutionary governments would exercise that authority either in the name of idealistic abstract rights or in the name of abstract rights concealing selfish ends. The present would be sacrificed for an imagined future. While composing the *Reflections,* Burke told a correspondent, "I confess . . . that I have no great opinion of that sublime abstract, metaphysic revisionary, contingent humanity, which in *cold blood* can subject the *present time,* and those whom we *daily see and converse with,* to *immediate* calamities in favour of the future and uncertain benefit of persons who *only exist in idea*."[37]

In France, as is often ignored or forgotten, that drive toward political abstraction through the eradication of longstanding manners and morals, religion, tradition, and law led not only to the execution of the monarch and others in his family but to the deaths of thousands of peasants, who actually constituted the single largest group killed during the reign of terror. And such death coming to ordinary people in the name of utopian goals would continue to be the case throughout European history—from Burke's day through the opening of the twenty-first century as the empire of light and reason embodied in fascist, communist, or radically nationalist regimes stripped ordinary individual human beings of any personal characteristics that would inhibit governments from destroying them. This deadly utopian phenomenon has, of course, not been limited to the European experience nor only to secular political ideologies. Whereas through most of the twentieth century political ideologies were often described as secular religion, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed the resurgence of religious ideologies functioning as political forces and displacing secular governments. Burke would not have been surprised.

This issue leads back to Richard Price's sermon enunciating a particular interpretation of the English Revolution of 1688, an argument that Burke repudiates at length in the *Reflections*. Both men agreed that 1688 and the constitutional changes emanating therefrom had been a good thing. But Burke was determined that 1688 be understood as a complex historical event carried out by hesitant political actors and not as an event either justified by or justifying a set of disruptive instrumental ideas. Price had claimed that the Revolution of 1688 established the right of the English to choose their kings and cashier them for misbehavior. He thus appealed to a universalistic principle of political action that could presumably be applied at any time and any place. Burke explored in some detail what actually occurred in 1688 and emphasized how modest by his lights were the departures from previous practice. For Burke the cashiering of kings was the exception to the rule and something that might occur only in the rarest instance, and this from a man who had spent so much of his political career disparaging George III. Burke understood political ideas and ideals as explaining why and how political structures exist and function as they do, not as serving to spur immediate or future action. He knew that 1688 had involved a good deal more disruption than he admitted, but he downplayed all of that confusion because he was determined that a radical interpretation

of 1688 not be made a prescriptive model for his own day. The Revolution of 1688 was an episode that constituted a can of worms that he was determined should remain unopened, or an event that should be understood in the most conservative possible fashion.

The difference between Burke and Price did not, however, arise simply over interpreting the Revolution of 1688 and deciding what lessons it held for the present. The real difference was that Burke actually took Price's ideas very seriously, whereas Price may not have. For more than two decades Price and other English political radicals had made extravagant radical political statements and claims without seeing Parliament reformed, the electoral system changed, or religious disabilities removed. Thus, as much as they sincerely believed what they said, they actually had not seen their ideas, which had become increasingly radical, accomplish much. Talk among English politically radical Dissenters had become cheap. Burke realized that with the example of revolution in France suddenly before the English public, talk could no longer be cheap. A new climate of opinion suddenly had emerged in which the idle political chatter of an earlier day could become a call to destructive action. Burke recognized that what was transpiring in France had transformed the politics of Europe for the foreseeable future.

Like William Butler Yeats meditating on the Easter 1916 uprising in Dublin, Burke saw that the French turmoil meant things political had "changed, Changed utterly." Events in France had given Price's reformist rhetoric an import that it had not possessed even a few months earlier. France by the middle of 1790 provided what had not existed in Europe since the English Civil War—a demonstration case of the effective toppling of a monarchy, ancient legislative body, and national church, and their reconstruction on radical ideological models. Not all the actors in France had changed—Louis XVI was still king—but the political principles and institutional settings informing and determining the behavior of the actors had been transformed. Burke grasped that the coming to the fore of the rights of man and popular sovereignty with no permanently constituted authority to define or circumscribe either was the crucial element. That ideology could, and in 1791 he predicted would, skip across borders, causing political and social tumult as nothing since the explosive ideas of the Protestant Reformation. Price's sermon delivered in this new context was not one more demand for reform in England. In Burke's mind it

sounded a clarion call to a revolution. The universalistic principles enunciated by Price too closely resembled those driving action in France for Burke to ignore them or to let them escape rigorous condemnation.

Burke's is the politics of the thinking, skeptical liberal prepared to recognize complexity as inherent in political life. Like the thought of all fundamentally liberal writers, Burke's is meaningless and impotent if his admirers and opponents are unwilling to engage him. In a world of political actors who in the face of unprecedented events continue to react on the basis of unexamined ideas and the repetition of hackneyed political cant rather than really coming to grips with problems, Burke can appear only as a voice throwing up chimerical roadblocks. Burke could not and did not halt those whom Jacob Burkhardt would later term the "terrible simplifiers."[38] But for those who believe things political and things social are anything but simple, and the preservation of political liberty and decent civil behavior in any age never certain, Burke invites a profound discussion of how fundamentally if imperfectly free societies can preserve freedom and prudentially extend its circle, maintain internal civility, and protect themselves from external enemies. Burke would ask political actors to think deeply so that they may act wisely. In the wake of more than two centuries of destructive political utopianism and now religious fundamentalism around the globe, Burke's may prove a welcome though difficult invitation. It has, however, often proved to be an invitation all too resistible to those determined to answer the siren calls of ideologies that promise a new age only at the cost of the destruction of both the past and the present, and to those so hopelessly enmeshed in the conceptual categories of the past that they cannot recognize new defining political moments.

Yet Burke's remains an incomplete vision of politics. There are issues that he sweeps aside with his bold polemical brush as unworthy of attention or as fully decided when he in fact knew they were not settled. The most significant of these is the issue of equality in a politically liberal society. A full examination of Burke's views on equality is not possible here. They are complicated and perhaps not wholly consistent.

In the *Reflections* Burke deplored what he sees as the equality that may emerge from a tyrannical state in which all citizens or subjects stand equally imperiled by a powerful sovereign, in this case the French National Assembly, unrestrained by law, custom, manners, morals, or religion. He again and again predicted that the revolution would culminate in a military

despotism. But in the process of deploring this drive for equality associated with tyranny, Burke condemned virtually all other efforts to establish social and political equality as also necessarily leading to the tyrannical conclusion. For example, at one point he announced, “Believe me, Sir, those who attempt to level, never equalize. In all societies, consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some description must be uppermost. The levelers, therefore only change and pervert the natural order of things; they load the edifice of society by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground” (42). He denounced such efforts as “an usurpation on the prerogatives of nature” (42).

But Burke also insisted that he did not want “to confine power, authority, and distinction to blood and names and titles” (43). He saw “virtue and wisdom” as the fundamental qualification for government, but he added that if access to a role in government “be opened through virtue, let it be remembered, too, that virtue is never tried but by some difficulty and some struggle” (43). For Burke, the best indication of success in that difficulty and struggle was the accumulation of significant property. He believed that the hereditary property and position of the aristocracy provided the “ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth” and that “some decent, regulated preeminence, some preference (not exclusive appropriation) given to birth is neither unnatural, nor unjust, nor impolitic” (44). Burke also very bluntly asserted that in the partnership which constitutes civil society “all men have equal rights; but not to equal things” (50).

These assertions jar the present-day reader as fundamentally unfair and deeply illiberal. They ignore the various kinds of inequality of opportunity or inequality arising from social position, racial background, or gender that account for so much inequality of property. By the standards of the twenty-first century Burke’s sentiments in regard to equality are indeed illiberal. But by the standards of the eighteenth century Burke’s opinions differed little from the view of unequal distribution and inheritance of property enunciated in John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Civil Government* and repeated by countless later authors. There Locke articulated a series of arguments that vigorously defended inequality of property as arising initially from different gifts of rationality and industriousness among human beings and then being sustained by a common assent to the inheritance of those resulting unequal quantities of property. Burke repeats in broad

outline Locke's presuppositions about the inheritance of unequal distributions of property, as he does Locke's views that the purpose of government is the preservation of property. Burke and Locke may differ in their premises, but not sharply in their conclusions, with both arguing in defense of a status quo of unequal property arrangements. Furthermore, it should be noted that the political order that emerged in revolutionary France was no less dedicated to the preservation of unequal property than was Burke.

The liberal tradition of political thought would really begin to come to grips with the problem of inequality only well into the nineteenth century, and then, as to this day, imperfectly. Interestingly, one of the major voices seeking to reconcile conservatives of Burkean temperament to both a greater acceptance of equality and of democracy was Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the great students of Burke. In *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) Tocqueville would appeal to a Burkean sense of the role of God in history and of religion in society to argue that the expansion of equality was a providential fact of world history and one not to be denied. He would also contend that the dangers that Burke and others after him associated with democracy could be tempered by religion, which the American experience demonstrated might flourish in a democracy. In that respect, two generations after his own death Burke furnished later liberal thinkers tools with which they began, however slowly, to accommodate a newly articulated body of liberal thought to the ideals of equality and popular sovereignty that in the turmoil of the 1790s Burke himself could not imagine as other than destructive.

Notes

1. For the best succinct coverage of Burke's career, consult David Bromwich, Introduction, in Edmund Burke, *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters,* David Bromwich, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1–42.

2. Shortly after organizing itself, the National Assembly changed its name to the National Constituent Assembly. Burke, however, consistently uses the first term, and throughout this introduction I follow his practice.

3. These have been brilliantly probed by Rogers M. Smith in *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

4. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: International, 1972), 15.

5. Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country, Delivered on 4 November 1789 at the Meeting House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain,*

quoted in Alfred Cobban, *The Debate on the French Revolution, 1789–1800* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 63–64.

6. Price later denied this charge, claiming that the event he had in mind was Louis XVI's reviewing of the new French National Guard after the fall of the Bastille. See "Richard Price's reply to Burke," in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* J. C. D. Clark, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 425.

7. Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1990).

8. Edmund Burke to the Earl of Charlemont, August 9, 1789, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 250–51. This edition of letters and its introduction have done much to shape my thinking about Burke.

9. Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot,* Richard N. Schwab, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 103.

10. Edmund Burke, "Thoughts on French Affairs 1791," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 4: 328.

11. Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

12. Burke, "Thoughts on French Affairs 1791," 4: 352.

13. In this respect Burke's argument was historically double-edged. He argued that the Enlightenment had been a fundamental cause of the French Revolution. He also rendered a particular historical interpretation of the Enlightenment itself, primarily equating it with rationalism. During the second half of the twentieth century, historians challenged and refined both of Burke's profoundly influential assertions.

14. David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the Second, 1688: A New Edition, with the Author's Last Corrections and Improvements* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, & Haffelfinger, n.d.), 5: 531.

15. Edmund Burke, "Tracts Relating to Popery" (1765), in *The Writing and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, R. B. McDowell, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 9: 455.

16. John Bramhall, "The Catching of Leviathan, or the Great Whale," in *Leviathan: Contemporary Responses to the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes,* G. A. J. Rogers, ed. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1995), 117. See also Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

17. Bramhall, "Catching of Leviathan," 117.

18. Ibid., 135.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 141.

21. Ibid., 129–40.

22. Edmund Burke to Claude-François de Rivarol, June 1, 1791, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 292.

23. Edmund Burke to Joseph Hartford, September 27, 1780, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 247. This entire letter is quite informative, as are Mansfield's comments on pp. 241–42.

24. See J. G. A. Pocock, "The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution," in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

25. Edmund Burke to Florimond-Claude, Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, circa August 6, 1793, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 332.

26. Ibid., 330.

27. Ibid.

28. Edmund Burke to Richard Burke, Jr., September 20, 1791, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 303.

29. Ibid., 304. Burke had by this point retreated from his comment of the summer of 1789 that the French might require a "Strong hand like that of their former masters to coerce them." See note 8 above.

30. Philip Francis to Edmund Burke, February 19, 1790, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 270.

31. Edmund Burke to Philip Francis, February 20/21, 1790, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 273.

32. Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

33. Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2002), 25–62, 189–222. On gentility, see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3–125.

34. Paul Fussell, *The Rhetoric of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). This volume draws numerous incisive links between Burke and Swift.

35. See Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

36. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

37. Edmund Burke to Adrein-Jean-François Duport, post March 29, 1790, in *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke,* 284 (emphasis in original).

38. On this concept, see Gottfried Dietze, Introduction, in Jacob Burkhardt, *Reflections on History* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1979), 21.

Reflections on the Revolution in France Edmund Burke

REFLECTIONS
ON
THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE,
AND
ON THE PROCEEDINGS IN CERTAIN SOCIETIES IN LONDON RELATIVE TO THAT EVENT:
IN A LETTER
INTENDED TO HAVE BEEN SENT TO A GENTLEMAN IN PARIS.
1790.

It may not be unnecessary to inform the reader, that the following Reflections had their origin in a correspondence between the Author and a very young gentleman at Paris, who did him the honour of desiring his opinion upon the important transactions, which then, and ever since, have so much occupied the attention of all men. An answer was written some time in the month of October, 1789; but it was kept back upon prudential considerations.[1] That letter is alluded to in the beginning of the following sheets. It has been since forwarded to the person to whom it was addressed. The reasons for the delay in sending it were assigned in a short letter to the same gentleman. This produced on his part a new and pressing application for the Author's sentiments.

The Author began a second and more full discussion on the subject. This he had some thoughts of publishing early in the last spring; but, the matter gaining upon him, he found that what he had undertaken not only far exceeded the measure of a letter, but that its importance required rather a more detailed consideration than at that time he had any leisure to bestow upon it. However, having thrown down his first thoughts in the form of a

letter, and, indeed, when he sat down to write, having intended it for a private letter, he found it difficult to change the form of address, when his sentiments had grown into a greater extent, and had received another direction.

1. Charles-Jean-François Depont (1767–96), a young French acquaintance of Burke's who had become a member of the National Assembly, had written to Burke on November 4, 1789, but in 1790 Burke mistakenly recalled an October date.

A different plan, he is sensible, might be more favourable to a commodious division and distribution of his matter.

Dear Sir,

You are pleased to call again, and with some earnestness, for my thoughts on the late proceedings in France. I will not give you reason to imagine that I think my sentiments of such value as to wish myself to be solicited about them. They are of too little consequence to be very anxiously either communicated or withheld. It was from attention to you, and to you only, that I hesitated at the time when you first desired to receive them. In the first letter I had the honour to write to you, and which at length I send, I wrote neither for, nor from, any description of men; nor shall I in this. My errors, if any, are my own. My reputation alone is to answer for them.

You see, Sir, by the long letter I have transmitted to you, that though I do most heartily wish that France may be animated by a spirit of rational liberty, and that I think you bound, in all honest policy, to provide a permanent body in which that spirit may reside, and an effectual organ by which it may act, it is my misfortune to entertain great doubts concerning several material points in your late transactions.

You imagined, when you wrote last, that I might possibly be reckoned among the approvers of certain proceedings in France, from the solemn public seal of sanction they have received from two clubs of gentlemen in London, called the Constitutional Society, and the Revolution Society.

I certainly have the honour to belong to more clubs than one, in which the constitution of this kingdom, and the principles of the glorious Revolution, are held in high reverence; and I reckon myself among the most forward in my zeal for maintaining that constitution and those principles in

their utmost purity and vigour. It is because I do so that I think it necessary for me that there should be no mistake. Those who cultivate the memory of our Revolution, and those who are attached to the constitution of this kingdom, will take good care how they are involved with persons, who under the pretext of zeal towards the Revolution and constitution too frequently wander from their true principles; and are ready on every occasion to depart from the firm but cautious and deliberate spirit which produced the one, and which presides in the other. Before I proceed to answer the more material particulars in your letter, I shall beg leave to give you such information as I have been able to obtain of the two clubs which have thought proper, as bodies, to interfere in the concerns of France; first assuring you, that I am not, and that I have never been, a member of either of those societies.

The first, calling itself the Constitutional Society, or Society for Constitutional Information, or by some such title, is, I believe, of seven or eight years standing. The institution of this society appears to be of a charitable, and so far of a laudable nature: it was intended for the circulation, at the expense of the members, of many books, which few others would be at the expense of buying; and which might lie on the hands of the booksellers, to the great loss of an useful body of men. Whether the books, so charitably circulated, were ever as charitably read, is more than I know. Possibly several of them have been exported to France; and, like goods not in request here, may with you have found a market. I have heard much talk of the lights to be drawn from books that are sent from hence. What improvements they have had in their passage (as it is said some liquors are meliorated by crossing the sea) I cannot tell: but I never heard a man of common judgment, or the least degree of information, speak a word in praise of the greater part of the publications circulated by that society; nor have their proceedings been accounted, except by some of themselves, as of any serious consequence.

Your National Assembly seems to entertain much the same opinion that I do of this poor charitable club. As a nation, you reserved the whole stock of your eloquent acknowledgments for the Revolution Society; when their fellows in the Constitutional were, in equity, entitled to some share. Since you have selected the Revolution Society as the great object of your national thanks and praises, you will think me excusable in making its late conduct the subject of my observations. The National Assembly of France

has given importance to these gentlemen by adopting them: and they return the favour, by acting as a committee in England for extending the principles of the National Assembly. Henceforward we must consider them as a kind of privileged persons; as no inconsiderable members in the diplomatic body. This is one among the revolutions which have given splendour to obscurity, and distinction to undiscerned merit. Until very lately I do not recollect to have heard of this club. I am quite sure that it never occupied a moment of my thoughts; nor, I believe, those of any person out of their own set. I find, upon inquiry, that on the anniversary of the Revolution in 1688, a club of dissenters, but of what denomination I know not, have long had the custom of hearing a sermon in one of their churches; and that afterwards they spent the day cheerfully, as other clubs do, at the tavern. But I never heard that any public measure, or political system, much less that the merits of the constitution of any foreign nation, had been the subject of a formal proceeding at their festivals; until, to my inexpressible surprise, I found them in a sort of public capacity, by a congratulatory address, giving an authoritative sanction to the proceedings of the National Assembly in France.

In the ancient principles and conduct of the club, so far at least as they were declared, I see nothing to which I could take exception. I think it very probable, that for some purpose, new members may have entered among them; and that some truly Christian politicians, who love to dispense benefits, but are careful to conceal the hand which distributes the dole, may have made them the instruments of their pious designs. Whatever I may have reason to suspect concerning private management, I shall speak of nothing as of a certainty but what is public.

For one, I should be sorry to be thought, directly or indirectly, concerned in their proceedings. I certainly take my full share, along with the rest of the world, in my individual and private capacity, in speculating on what has been done, or is doing, on the public stage, in any place ancient or modern; in the republic of Rome, or the republic of Paris; but having no general apostolical mission, being a citizen of a particular state, and being bound up, in a considerable degree, by its public will, I should think it at least improper and irregular for me to open a formal public correspondence with the actual government of a foreign nation, without the express authority of the government under which I live.

I should be still more unwilling to enter into that correspondence under anything like an equivocal description, which to many, unacquainted with our usages, might make the address, in which I joined, appear as the act of persons in some sort of corporate capacity, acknowledged by the laws of this kingdom, and authorized to speak the sense of some part of it. On account of the ambiguity and uncertainty of unauthorized general descriptions, and of the deceit which may be practised under them, and not from mere formality, the House of Commons would reject the most sneaking petition for the most trifling object, under that mode of signature to which you have thrown open the folding doors of your presence chamber, and have ushered into your National Assembly with as much ceremony and parade, and with as great a bustle of applause, as if you had been visited by the whole representative majesty of the whole English nation. If what this society has thought proper to send forth had been a piece of argument, it would have signified little whose argument it was. It would be neither the more nor the less convincing on account of the party it came from. But this is only a vote and resolution. It stands solely on authority; and in this case it is the mere authority of individuals, few of whom appear. Their signatures ought, in my opinion, to have been annexed to their instrument. The world would then have the means of knowing how many they are; who they are; and of what value their opinions may be, from their personal abilities, from their knowledge, their experience, or their lead and authority in this state. To me, who am but a plain man, the proceeding looks a little too refined, and too ingenious; it has too much the air of a political stratagem, adopted for the sake of giving, under a high-sounding name, an importance to the public declarations of this club, which, when the matter came to be closely inspected, they did not altogether so well deserve. It is a policy that has very much the complexion of a fraud.

I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any gentleman of that society, be he who he will; and perhaps I have given as good proofs of my attachment to that cause, in the whole course of my public conduct. I think I envy liberty as little as they do, to any other nation. But I cannot stand forward, and give praise or blame to anything which relates to human actions, and human concerns, on a simple view of the object, as it stands stripped of every relation, in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction. Circumstances (which with some gentlemen pass for nothing) give in reality to every political principle its

distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind. Abstractedly speaking, government, as well as liberty, is good; yet could I, in common sense, ten years ago, have felicitated France on her enjoyment of a government (for she then had a government) without inquiry what the nature of that government was, or how it was administered? Can I now congratulate the same nation upon its freedom? Is it because liberty in the abstract may be classed amongst the blessings of mankind, that I am seriously to felicitate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty? Am I to congratulate a highwayman and murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights? This would be to act over again the scene of the criminals condemned to the galleys, and their heroic deliverer, the metaphysic knight of the sorrowful countenance.[2]

When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild *gas,* the fixed air, is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgment until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface. I must be tolerably sure, before I venture publicly to congratulate men upon a blessing, that they have really received one. Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver; and adulation is not of more service to the people than to kings.

2. “knight of the sorrowful countenance”: reference to Don Quixote, who freed certain criminals only to be attacked by them

I should therefore suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things too; and, without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long. The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: we ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risk

congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints. Prudence would dictate this in the case of separate, insulated, private men; but liberty, when men act in bodies, is *power.* Considerate people, before they declare themselves, will observe the use which is made of *power;* and particularly of so trying a thing as *new* power in *new* persons, of whose principles, tempers, and dispositions they have little or no experience, and in situations, where those who appear the most stirring in the scene may possibly not be the real movers.

All these considerations however were below the transcendental dignity of the Revolution Society. Whilst I continued in the country, from whence I had the honour of writing to you, I had but an imperfect idea of their transactions. On my coming to town, I sent for an account of their proceedings, which had been published by their authority, containing a sermon of Dr. Price, with the Duke de Rochefaucault's and the Archbishop of Aix's letter, and several other documents annexed.[3] The whole of that publication, with the manifest design of connecting the affairs of France with those of England, by drawing us into an imitation of the conduct of the National Assembly, gave me a considerable degree of uneasiness. The effect of that conduct upon the power, credit, prosperity, and tranquillity of France, became every day more evident. The form of constitution to be settled, for its future polity, became more clear. We are now in a condition to discern, with tolerable exactness, the true nature of the object held up to our imitation.

3. The full reference to the edition to which Burke refers is Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the Meeting House in the Old Jewry to the Society for commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain. With an Appendix containing the Report of the Committee of the Society; an account of the population of France; and the Declaration of Right by the National Assembly of France. Third Edition, with additions to the Appendix containing communications from France occasioned by the Congratulatory Address of the Revolution Society to the National Assembly of France, with the Answers to them* (London, 1790).

If the prudence of reserve and decorum dictates silence in some circumstances, in others prudence of a higher order may justify us in speaking our thoughts. The beginnings of confusion with us in England are at present feeble enough; but, with you, we have seen an infancy, still more feeble, growing by moments into a strength to heap mountains upon mountains, and to wage war with heaven itself. Whenever our neighbour's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our

own. Better to be despised for too anxious apprehensions, than ruined by too confident a security.

Solicitous chiefly for the peace of my own country, but by no means unconcerned for yours, I wish to communicate more largely what was at first intended only for your private satisfaction. I shall still keep your affairs in my eye, and continue to address myself to you. Indulging myself in the freedom of epistolary intercourse, I beg leave to throw out my thoughts, and express my feelings, just as they arise in my mind, with very little attention to formal method. I set out with the proceedings of the Revolution Society; but I shall not confine myself to them. Is it possible I should? It appears to me as if I were in a great crisis, not of the affairs of France alone, but of all Europe, perhaps of more than Europe. All circumstances taken together, the French Revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world. The most wonderful things are brought about in many instances by means the most absurd and ridiculous; in the most ridiculous modes; and, apparently, by the most contemptible instruments. Everything seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragicomic scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind; alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror.

It cannot however be denied, that to some this strange scene appeared in quite another point of view. Into them it inspired no other sentiments than those of exultation and rapture. They saw nothing in what has been done in France, but a firm and temperate exertion of freedom; so consistent, on the whole, with morals and with piety, as to make it deserving not only of the secular applause of dashing Machiavelian politicians, but to render it a fit theme for all the devout effusions of sacred eloquence.

On the forenoon of the 4th of November last, Doctor Richard Price, a non-conforming minister of eminence, preached at the dissenting meetinghouse of the Old Jewry, to his club or society, a very extraordinary miscellaneous sermon, in which there are some good moral and religious sentiments, and not ill expressed, mixed up in a sort of porridge of various political opinions and reflections; but the Revolution in France is the grand ingredient in the cauldron. I consider the address transmitted by the Revolution Society to the National Assembly, through Earl Stanhope, as originating in the principles of the sermon, and as a corollary from them. It

was moved by the preacher of that discourse. It was passed by those who came reeking from the effect of the sermon, without any censure or qualification, expressed or implied. If, however, any of the gentlemen concerned shall wish to separate the sermon from the resolution, they know how to acknowledge the one, and to disavow the other. They may do it: I cannot.

For my part, I looked on that sermon as the public declaration of a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians, both at home and abroad. I know they set him up as a sort of oracle; because, with the best intentions in the world, he naturally *philippizes,* and chants his prophetic song in exact unison with their designs.[4]

That sermon is in a strain which I believe has not been heard in this kingdom, in any of the pulpits which are tolerated or encouraged in it, since the year 1648; when a predecessor of Dr. Price, the Rev. Hugh Peters, made the vault of the king's own chapel at St. James's ring with the honour and privilege of the saints, who, with the "high praises of God in their mouths, and a *two*-edged sword in their hands, were to execute judgment on the heathen, and punishments upon the *people;* to bind their *kings* with chains, and their *nobles* with fetters of iron."[5] Few harangues from the pulpit, except in the days of your league in France, or in the days of our solemn league and covenant in England, have ever breathed less of the spirit of moderation than this lecture in the Old Jewry. Supposing, however, that something like moderation were visible in this political sermon; yet politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity. The cause of civil liberty and civil government gains as little as that of religion by this confusion of duties. Those who quit their proper character, to assume what does not belong to them, are, for the greater part, ignorant both of the character they leave, and of the character they assume. Wholly unacquainted with the world in which they are so fond of meddling, and inexperienced in all its affairs, on which they pronounce with so much confidence, they have nothing of politics but the passions they excite.

4. "philippizes": In ancient Athens, the orator Demosthenes, who repeatedly warned against aggression from Macedonia, accused those who thought or advised otherwise of "philippizing"—that is, being sympathetic to King Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great.

5. * Psalm cxlix.

Surely the church is a place where one day's truce ought to be allowed to the dissensions and animosities of mankind.

This pulpit style, revived after so long a discontinuance, had to me the air of novelty, and of a novelty not wholly without danger. I do not charge this danger equally to every part of the discourse. The hint given to a noble and reverend lay-divine, who is supposed high in office in one of our universities,[6] and other lay-divines "of *rank* and literature," may be proper and seasonable, though somewhat new. If the noble *Seekers* should find nothing to satisfy their pious fancies in the old staple of the national church, or in all the rich variety to be found in the well-assorted warehouses of the dissenting congregations, Dr. Price advises them to improve upon non-conformity; and to set up, each of them, a separate meeting-house upon his own particular principles.[7] It is somewhat remarkable that this reverend divine should be so earnest for setting up new churches, and so perfectly indifferent concerning the doctrine which may be taught in them. His zeal is of a curious character. It is not for the propagation of his own opinions, but of any opinions. It is not for the diffusion of truth, but for the spreading of contradiction. Let the noble teachers but dissent, it is no matter from whom or from what. This great point once secured, it is taken for granted their religion will be rational and manly. I doubt whether religion would reap all the benefits which the calculating divine computes from this "great company of great preachers." It would certainly be a valuable addition of nondescripts to the ample collection of known classes, genera and species, which at present beautify the *hortus siccus* of dissent.[8] A sermon from a noble duke, or a noble marquis, or a noble earl, or baron bold, would certainly increase and diversify the amusements of this town, which begins to grow satiated with the uniform round of its vapid dissipations.

6. * Discourse on the Love of our Country, Nov. 4th, 1789, by Dr. Richard Price, 3rd edition, p. 17 and 18.

7. * "Those who dislike that mode of worship which is prescribed by public authority, ought, if they can find *no* worship *out* of the church which they approve, *to set up a separate worship for themselves;* and by doing this, and giving an example of a rational and manly worship, men of *weight* from their *rank* and literature may do the greatest service to society and the world."—P. 18, Dr. Price's Sermon.

8. *hortus siccus*: dried plants or a garden of dried plants. My colleague David Bromwich has suggested that by this phrase Burke may wish to hint that Dissenters such as Price resembled dried tinder that might erupt in flame.

I should only stipulate that these new *Mess-Johns* in robes and coronets should keep some sort of bounds in the democratic and levelling principles which are expected from their titled pulpits.[9] The new evangelists will, I dare say, disappoint the hopes that are conceived of them. They will not become, literally as well as figuratively, polemic divines, nor be disposed so to drill their congregations, that they may, as in former blessed times, preach their doctrines to regiments of dragoons and corps of infantry and artillery. Such arrangements, however favourable to the cause of compulsory freedom, civil and religious, may not be equally conducive to the national tranquillity. These few restrictions I hope are no great stretches of intolerance, no very violent exertions of despotism.

But I may say of our preacher, "*utinam nugis tota illa dedisset tempora sœvitiœ.*"—All things in this his fulminating bull are not of so innoxious a tendency.[10] His doctrines affect our constitution in its vital parts. He tells the Revolution Society in this political sermon, that his Majesty "is almost the *only* lawful king in the world, because the *only* one who owes his crown to the *choice of his people.*" As to the kings of *the world,* all of whom (except one) this archpontiff of the *rights of men,* with all the plenitude, and with more than the boldness, of the papal deposing power in its meridian fervour of the twelfth century, puts into one sweeping clause of ban and anathema, and proclaims usurpers by circles of longitude and latitude, over the whole globe, it behoves them to consider how they admit into their territories these apostolic missionaries, who are to tell their subjects they are not lawful kings. That is their concern. It is ours, as a domestic interest of some moment, seriously to consider the solidity of the *only* principle upon which these gentlemen acknowledge a king of Great Britain to be entitled to their allegiance.

This doctrine, as applied to the prince now on the British throne, either is nonsense, and therefore neither true nor false, or it affirms a most unfounded, dangerous, illegal, and unconstitutional position. According to this spiritual doctor of politics, if his Majesty does not owe his crown to the choice of his people, he is no *lawful king.* Now nothing can be more untrue than that the crown of this kingdom is so held by his Majesty.

9. *Mess-Johns:* a term of Scottish origin to indicate ordinary parsons
10. "Would that to nonsense like this he had given all his devotion,
Spared that savage caprice which took away from the city

Bright illustrious souls." Juvenal, *Satires,* 4: 150–51, in *The Satires of Juvenal,* Rolfe Humphries, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 53.

Therefore if you follow their rule, the king of Great Britain, who most certainly does not owe his high office to any form of popular election, is in no respect better than the rest of the gang of usurpers, who reign, or rather rob, all over the face of this our miserable world, without any sort of right or title to the allegiance of their people. The policy of this general doctrine, so qualified, is evident enough. The propagators of this political gospel are in hopes that their abstract principle (their principle that a popular choice is necessary to the legal existence of the sovereign magistracy) would be overlooked, whilst the king of Great Britain was not affected by it. In the mean time the ears of their congregations would be gradually habituated to it, as if it were a first principle admitted without dispute. For the present it would only operate as a theory, pickled in the preserving juices of pulpit eloquence, and laid by for future use. *Condo et compono quæ mox depromere possim.*[11] By this policy, whilst our government is soothed with a reservation in its favour, to which it has no claim, the security, which it has in common with all governments, so far as opinion is security, is taken away.

Thus these politicians proceed, whilst little notice is taken of their doctrines; but when they come to be examined upon the plain meaning of their words, and the direct tendency of their doctrines, then equivocations and slippery constructions come into play. When they say the king owes his crown to the choice of his people, and is therefore the only lawful sovereign in the world, they will perhaps tell us they mean to say no more than that some of the king's predecessors have been called to the throne by some sort of choice; and therefore he owes his crown to the choice of his people. Thus, by a miserable subterfuge, they hope to render their proposition safe, by rendering it nugatory. They are welcome to the asylum they seek for their offence, since they take refuge in their folly. For, if you admit this interpretation, how does their idea of election differ from our idea of inheritance? And how does the settlement of the crown in the Brunswick line derived from James the First come to legalize our monarchy, rather than that of any of the neighbouring countries? At some time or other, to be sure, all the beginners of dynasties were chosen by those who called them to govern. There is ground enough for the opinion that all the kingdoms of

Europe were, at a remote period, elective, with more or fewer limitations in the objects of choice.

11. “And I now form my philosophic lore, / For all my future life a treasur’d store.” Horace, *Epistles,* I, 1, 12, in *A Poetical Translation of the Works of Horace,* Philip Francis, trans. (London, 1807), 4: 5.

But whatever kings might have been here, or elsewhere, a thousand years ago, or in whatever manner the ruling dynasties of England or France may have begun, the king of Great Britain is, at this day, king by a fixed rule of succession, according to the laws of his country; and whilst the legal conditions of the compact of sovereignty are performed by him, (as they are performed,) he holds his crown in contempt of the choice of the Revolution Society, who have not a single vote for a king amongst them, either individually or collectively; though I make no doubt they would soon erect themselves into an electoral college, if things were ripe to give effect to their claim. His Majesty’s heirs and successors, each in his time and order, will come to the crown with the same contempt of their choice with which his Majesty has succeeded to that he wears.

Whatever may be the success of evasion in explaining away the gross error of *fact,* which supposes that his Majesty (though he holds it in concurrence with the wishes) owes his crown to the choice of his people, yet nothing can evade their full explicit declaration, concerning the principle of a right in the people to choose; which right is directly maintained, and tenaciously adhered to. All the oblique insinuations concerning election bottom in this proposition, and are referable to it. Lest the foundation of the king’s exclusive legal title should pass for a mere rant of adulatory freedom, the political divine proceeds dogmatically to assert,[12] that, by the principles of the Revolution, the people of England have acquired three fundamental rights, all which, with him, compose one system, and lie together in one short sentence; namely, that we have acquired a right,

1. “To choose our own governors.”
2. “To cashier them for misconduct.”
3. “To frame a government for ourselves.”

This new, and hitherto, unheard-of, bill of rights, though made in the name of the whole people, belongs to those gentlemen and their faction only. The

body of the people of England have no share in it. They utterly disclaim it. They will resist the practical assertion of it with their lives and fortunes. They are bound to do so by the laws of their country, made at the time of that very Revolution which is appealed to in favour of the fictitious rights claimed by the Society which abuses its name.

These gentlemen of the Old Jewry, in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a Revolution which happened in England about forty years before, and the late French Revolution, so much before their eyes, and in their hearts, that they are constantly confounding all the three together. It is necessary that we should separate what they confound. We must recall their erring fancies to the *acts* of the Revolution which we revere, for the discovery of its true *principles.* If the *principles* of the Revolution of 1688 are anywhere to be found, it is in the statute called the *Declaration of Right.*

12. * Discourse on the Love of our Country, by Dr. Price, p. 34.

In that most wise, sober, and considerate declaration, drawn up by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by warm and inexperienced enthusiasts, not one word is said, nor one suggestion made, of a general right "to choose our own *governors;* to cashier them for misconduct; and to *form* a government for *ourselves.*"

This Declaration of Right (the act of the 1st of William and Mary, sess. 2, ch. 2) is the corner-stone of our constitution, as reinforced, explained, improved, and in its fundamental principles for ever settled. It is called "An Act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for *settling* the *succession* of the crown." You will observe, that these rights and this succession are declared in one body, and bound indissolubly together.

A few years after this period, a second opportunity offered for asserting a right of election to the crown. On the prospect of a total failure of issue from King William, and from the Princess, afterwards Queen Anne, the consideration of the settlement of the crown, and of a further security for the liberties of the people, again came before the legislature. Did they this second time make any provision for legalizing the crown on the spurious revolution principles of the Old Jewry? No. They followed the principles which prevailed in the Declaration of Right; indicating with more precision the persons who were to inherit in the Protestant line. This act also

incorporated, by the same policy, our liberties, and an hereditary succession in the same act. Instead of a right to choose our own governors, they declared that the *succession* in that line (the Protestant line drawn from James the First) was absolutely necessary "for the peace, quiet, and security of the realm," and that it was equally urgent on them "to maintain a *certainty in the succession* thereof, to which the subjects may safely have recourse for their protection." Both these acts, in which are heard the unerring, unambiguous oracles of revolution policy, instead of countenancing the delusive, gipsy predictions of a "right to choose our governors," prove to a demonstration how totally adverse the wisdom of the nation was from turning a case of necessity into a rule of law.

Unquestionably there was at the Revolution, in the person of King William, a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession; but it is against all genuine principles of jurisprudence to draw a principle from a law made in a special case, and regarding an individual person. *Privilegium non transit in exemplum.*[13]

13. *Privilegium non transit in exemplum:* "A privilege does not become a precedent." This concept is part of Roman law.

If ever there was a time favourable for establishing the principle, that a king of popular choice was the only legal king, without all doubt it was at the Revolution. Its not being done at that time is a proof that the nation was of opinion it ought not to be done at any time. There is no person so completely ignorant of our history as not to know, that the majority in parliament of both parites were so little disposed to anything resembling that principle, that at first they were determined to place the vacant crown, not on the head of the Prince of Orange, but on that of his wife Mary, daughter of King James, the eldest born of the issue of that king, which they acknowledged as undoubtedly his. It would be to repeat a very trite story, to recall to your memory all those circumstances which demonstrated that their accepting King William was not properly a *choice;* but to all those who did not wish, in effect, to recall King James, or to deluge their country in blood, and again to bring their religion, laws, and liberties into the peril they had just escaped, it was an act of *necessity,* in the strictest moral sense in which necessity can be taken.

In the very act, in which for a time, and in a single case, parliament departed from the strict order of inheritance, in favour of a prince, who, though not next, was however very near, in the line of succession, it is curious to observe how Lord Somers, who drew the bill called the Declaration of Right, has comported himself on that delicate occasion. It is curious to observe with what address this temporary solution of continuity is kept from the eye; whilst all that could be found in this act of necessity to countenance the idea of an hereditary succession is brought forward, and fostered, and made the most of, by this great man, and by the legislature who followed him. Quitting the dry, imperative style of an act of parliament, he makes the Lords and Commons fall to a pious, legislative ejaculation, and declare, that they consider it "as a marvellous providence, and merciful goodness of God to this nation, to preserve their said Majesties' *royal* persons, most happily to reign over us *on the throne of their ancestors,* for which, from the bottom of their hearts, they return their humblest thanks and praises."—The legislature plainly had in view the act of recognition of the first of Queen Elizabeth, chap. 3rd, and of that of James the First, chap. 1st, both acts strongly declaratory of the inheritable nature of the crown, and in many parts they follow, with a nearly literal precision, the words and even the form of thanksgiving which is found in these old declaratory statutes.

The two Houses, in the act of King William, did not thank God that they had found a fair opportunity to assert a right to choose their own governors, much less to make an election the *only lawful* title to the crown. Their having been in a condition to avoid the very appearance of it, as much as possible, was by them considered as a providential escape. They threw a politic, well-wrought veil over every circumstance tending to weaken the rights, which in the meliorated order of succession they meant to perpetuate; or which might furnish a precedent for any future departure from what they had then settled for ever. Accordingly, that they might not relax the nerves of their monarchy, and that they might preserve a close conformity to the practice of their ancestors, as it appeared in the declaratory statutes of Queen Mary[14] and Queen Elizabeth, in the next clause they vest, by recognition, in their Majesties, *all* the legal prerogatives of the crown, declaring, "that in them they are most *fully,* rightfully, and *entirely* invested, incorporated, united and annexed." In the clause which follows, for preventing questions, by reason of any pretended titles to the

crown, they declare, (observing also in this the traditionary language, along with the traditionary policy of the nation, and repeating as from a rubric the language of the preceding acts of Elizabeth and James,) that on the preserving "a *certainty* in the SUCCESSION thereof, the unity, peace, and tranquillity of this nation doth, under God, wholly depend."

They knew that a doubtful title of succession would but too much resemble an election; and that an election would be utterly destructive of the "unity, peace, and tranquillity of this nation," which they thought to be considerations of some moment. To provide for these objects, and therefore to exclude for ever the Old Jewry doctrine of "a right to choose our own governors," they follow with a clause containing a most solemn pledge, taken from the preceding act of Queen Elizabeth, as solemn a pledge as ever was or can be given in favour of an hereditary succession, and as solemn a renunciation as could be made of the principles by this Society imputed to them. "The Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons, do, in the name of all the people aforesaid, most humbly and faithfully submit *themselves, their heirs and posterities for ever;* and do faithfully promise that they will stand to, maintain, and defend their said Majesties, and also the *limitation of the crown,* herein specified and contained, to the utmost of their powers," &c. &c.

So far is it from being true, that we acquired a right by the Revolution to elect our kings, that if we had possessed it before, the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate it, for themselves, and for all their posterity for ever.

14. * 1st Mary, sess. 3, ch. 1.

These gentlemen may value themselves as much as they please on their Whig principles; but I never desire to be thought a better Whig than Lord Somers; or to understand the principles of the Revolution better than those by whom it was brought about; or to read in the Declaration of Right any mysteries unknown to those whose penetrating style has engraved in our ordinances, and in our hearts, the words and spirit of that immortal law.

It is true, that, aided with the powers derived from force and opportunity, the nation was at that time, in some sense, free to take what course it pleased for filling the throne; but only free to do so upon the same grounds on which they might have wholly abolished their monarchy, and

every other part of their constitution. However, they did not think such bold changes within their commission. It is indeed difficult, perhaps impossible, to give limits to the mere *abstract* competence of the supreme power, such as was exercised by parliament at that time; but the limits of a *moral* competence, subjecting, even in powers more indisputably sovereign, occasional will to permanent reason, and to the steady maxims of faith, justice, and fixed fundamental policy, are perfectly intelligible, and perfectly binding upon those who exercise any authority, under any name, or under any title, in the state. The House of Lords, for instance, is not morally competent to dissolve the House of Commons; no, nor even to dissolve itself, nor to abdicate, if it would, its portion in the legislature of the kingdom. Though a king may abdicate for his own person, he cannot abdicate for the monarchy. By as strong, or by a stronger reason, the House of Commons cannot renounce its share of authority. The engagement and pact of society, which generally goes by the name of the constitution, forbids such invasion and such surrender. The constituent parts of a state are obliged to hold their public faith with each other, and with all those who derive any serious interest under their engagements, as much as the whole state is bound to keep its faith with separate communities. Otherwise competence and power would soon be confounded, and no law be left but the will of a prevailing force. On this principle the succession of the crown has always been what it now is, an hereditary succession by law: in the old line it was a succession by the common law; in the new by the statute law, operating on the principles of the common law, not changing the substance, but regulating the mode, and describing the persons. Both these descriptions of law are of the same force, and are derived from an equal authority, emanating from the common agreement and original compact of the state, *communi sponsione reipublicæ,* and as such are equally binding on king and people too, as long as the terms are observed, and they continue the same body politic.[15]

15. *Communi sponsione republicae:* "By the common volition of the commonwealth."

It is far from impossible to reconcile, if we do not suffer ourselves to be entangled in the mazes of metaphysic sophistry, the use both of a fixed rule and an occasional deviation; the sacredness of an hereditary principle of succession in our government, with a power of change in its application in

cases of extreme emergency. Even in that extremity, (if we take the measure of our rights by our exercise of them at the Revolution,) the change is to be confined to the peccant part only; to the part which produced the necessary deviation; and even then it is to be effected without a decomposition of the whole civil and political mass, for the purpose of originating a new civil order out of the first elements of society.

A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve. The two principles of conservation and correction operated strongly at the two critical periods of the Restoration and Revolution, when England found itself without a king. At both those periods the nation had lost the bond of union in their ancient edifice; they did not, however, dissolve the whole fabric. On the contrary, in both cases they regenerated the deficient part of the old constitution through the parts which were not impaired. They kept these old parts exactly as they were, that the part recovered might be suited to them. They acted by the ancient organized states in the shape of their old organization, and not by the organic *moleculæ* of a disbanded people.[16] At no time, perhaps, did the sovereign legislature manifest a more tender regard to that fundamental principle of British constitutional policy, than at the time of the Revolution, when it deviated from the direct line of hereditary succession. The crown was carried somewhat out of the line in which it had before moved; but the new line was derived from the same stock. It was still a line of hereditary descent; still an hereditary descent in the same blood, though an hereditary descent qualified with Protestantism. When the legislature altered the direction, but kept the principle, they showed that they held it inviolable.

On this principle, the law of inheritance had admitted some amendment in the old time, and long before the era of the Revolution. Some time after the conquest great questions arose upon the legal principles of hereditary descent.

16. *moleculae:* particles

17. E. J. Payne explains Burke's meaning in the following fashion: "The distinct is produced by taking two different points of view; the one regarding the crown as the right of

It became a matter of doubt, whether the heir *per capita* or the heir *per stripes* was to succeed;[17] but whether the heir *per capita* gave way when the

heirdom *per stripes* took place, or the Catholic heir when the Protestant was preferred, the inheritable principle survived with a sort of immortality through all transmigrations—*multosque per annos stat fortuna domus, et avi numerantur avorum.*[18] This is the spirit of our constitution, not only in its settled course, but in all its revolutions. Whoever came in, or however he came in, whether he obtained the crown by law, or by force, the hereditary succession was either continued or adopted.

The gentlemen of the Society for Revolutions see nothing in that of 1688 but the deviation from the constitution; and they take the deviation from the principle for the principle. They have little regard to the obvious consequences of their doctrine, though they must see, that it leaves positive authority in very few of the positive institutions of this country. When such an unwarrantable maxim is once established, that no throne is lawful but the elective, no one act of the princes who preceded this era of fictitious election can be valid. Do these theorists mean to imitate some of their predecessors, who dragged the bodies of our ancient sovereigns out of the quiet of their tombs? Do they mean to attaint and disable backwards all the kings that have reigned before the Revolution, and consequently to stain the throne of England with the blot of a continual usurpation? Do they mean to invalidate, annul, or to call into question, together with the titles of the whole line of our kings, that great body of our statute law which passed under those whom they treat as usurpers? to annul laws of inestimable value to our liberties—of as great value at least as any which have passed at or since the period of the Revolution? If kings, who did not owe their crown to the choice of their people, had no title to make laws, what will become of the statute *de tallagio non concedendo?*—of the *petition of right?*—of the act of *habeas corpus?*[19]

the reigning *family,* the other as the right of the reigning *person*. In the first case, when the reigning member of the family died, the whole of the members of the *family* (capita) reentered in to the family rights, and the crown fell to the 'eldest and most worthy.' In the second case, the crown descended to the legal heir or representative of the reigning person (*per stirpem*)." In *Burke: Select Works,* E. J. Payne, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886), 2: 308.

18. "For many a year stands firm the fortune of the house, and grandsires' grandsires are numbered on the roll." Virgil, *Georgics,* IV, 208–9. Here and elsewhere unless otherwise noted, the translations of ancient works are taken from the Loeb Classical Library editions.

19. Statute *de tallagio non concedendo* (1297) established the principle that taxes could be raised only with parliamentary consent.

Do these new doctors of the rights of men presume to assert, that King James the Second, who came to the crown as next of blood, according to the rules of a then unqualified succession, was not to all intents and purposes a lawful king of England, before he had done any of those acts which were justly construed into an abdication of his crown? If he was not, much trouble in parliament might have been saved at the period these gentlemen commemorate. But King James was a bad king with a good title, and not an usurper. The princes who succeeded according to the act of parliament which settled the crown on the Electress Sophia and on her descendants, being Protestants, came in as much by a title of inheritance as King James did. He came in according to the law, as it stood at his accession to the crown; and the princes of the House of Brunswick came to the inheritance of the crown, not by election, but by the law, as it stood at their several accessions of Protestant descent and inheritance, as I hope I have shown sufficiently.

The law, by which this royal family is specifically destined to the succession, is the act of the 12th and 13th of King William.[20] The terms of this act bind "us and our *heirs,* and our *posterity,* to them, their *heirs,* and their *posterity,*" being Protestants, to the end of time, in the same words as the Declaration of Right had bound us to the heirs of King William and Queen Mary. It therefore secures both an hereditary crown and an hereditary allegiance. On what ground, except the constitutional policy of forming an establishment to secure that kind of succession which is to preclude a choice of the people for ever, could the legislature have fastidiously rejected the fair and abundant choice which our country presented to them, and searched in strange lands for a foreign princess, from whose womb the line of our future rulers were to derive their title to govern millions of men through a series of ages?

The Princess Sophia was named in the act of settlement of the 12th and 13th of King William, for a *stock* and root of *inheritance* to our kings, and not for her merits as a temporary administratrix of a power, which she might not, and in fact did not, herself ever exercise. She was adopted for one reason, and for one only, because, says the act, "the most excellent Princess Sophia, Electress and Duchess Dowager of Hanover, is *daughter* of the most excellent Princess Elizabeth, late Queen of Bohemia, *daughter* of our late *sovereign lord* King James the First, of happy memory, and is

hereby declared to be the next in *succession* in the Protestant line," &c. &c.; "and the crown shall continue to the *heirs* of her body, being Protestants."

20. Parliament by the Act of Settlement of 1700 had established the succession to the British Throne through the German Hanoverian line because William III had no heirs and the future Queen Anne had no living heirs.

This limitation was made by parliament, that through the Princess Sophia an inheritable line not only was to be continued in future, but (what they thought very material) that through her it was to be connected with the old stock of inheritance in King James the First; in order that the monarchy might preserve an unbroken unity through all ages, and might be preserved (with safety to our religion) in the old approved mode by descent, in which, if our liberties had been once endangered, they had often, through all storms and struggles of prerogative and privilege, been preserved. They did well. No experience has taught us, that in any other course or method than that of an *hereditary crown* our liberties can be regularly perpetuated and preserved sacred as our *hereditary right.* An irregular, convulsive movement may be necessary to throw off an irregular, convulsive disease. But the course of succession is the healthy habit of the British constitution. Was it that the legislature wanted, at the act for the limitation of the crown in the Hanoverian line, drawn through the female descendants of James the First, a due sense of the inconveniences of having two or three, or possibly more, foreigners in succession to the British throne? No!—they had a due sense of the evils which might happen from such foreign rule, and more than a due sense of them. But a more decisive proof cannot be given of the full conviction of the British nation, that the principles of the Revolution did not authorize them to elect kings at their pleasure, and without any attention to the ancient fundamental principles of our government, than their continuing to adopt a plan of hereditary Protestant succession in the old line, with all the dangers and all the inconveniences of its being a foreign line full before their eyes, and operating with the utmost force upon their minds.

A few years ago I should be ashamed to overload a matter, so capable of supporting itself, by the then unnecessary support of any argument; but this seditious, unconstitutional doctrine is now publicly taught, avowed, and printed. The dislike I feel to revolutions, the signals for which have so often been given from pulpits; the spirit of change that is gone abroad; the total contempt which prevails with you, and may come to prevail with us, of all

ancient institutions, when set in opposition to a present sense of convenience, or to the bent of a present inclination: all these considerations make it not unadvisable, in my opinion, to call back our attention to the true principles of our own domestic laws; that you, my French friend, should begin to know, and that we should continue to cherish them. We ought not, on either side of the water, to suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the counterfeit wares which some persons, by a double fraud, export to you in illicit bottoms, as raw commodities of British growth, though wholly alien to our soil, in order afterwards to smuggle them back again into this country, manufactured after the newest Paris fashion of an improved liberty.

The people of England will not ape the fashions they have never tried, nor go back to those which they have found mischievous on trial. They look upon the legal hereditary succession of their crown as among their rights, not as among their wrongs; as a benefit, not as a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not as a badge of servitude. They look on the frame of their commonwealth, *such as it stands,* to be of inestimable value; and they conceive the undisturbed succession of the crown to be a pledge of the stability and perpetuity of all the other members of our constitution.

I shall beg leave, before I go any further, to take notice of some paltry artifices, which the abettors of election, as the only lawful title to the crown, are ready to employ, in order to render the support of the just principles of our constitution a task somewhat invidious. These sophisters substitute a fictitious cause, and feigned personages, in whose favour they suppose you engaged, whenever you defend the inheritable nature of the crown. It is common with them to dispute as if they were in a conflict with some of those exploded fanatics of slavery, who formerly maintained, what I believe no creature now maintains, "that the crown is held by divine hereditary and indefeasible right."—These old fanatics of single arbitrary power dogmatized as if hereditary royalty was the only lawful government in the world, just as our new fanatics of popular arbitrary power maintain that a popular election is the sole lawful source of authority. The old prerogative enthusiasts, it is true, did speculate foolishly, and perhaps impiously too, as if monarchy had more of a divine sanction than any other mode of government; and as if a right to govern by inheritance were in strictness *indefeasible* in every person, who should be found in the succession to a throne, and under every circumstance, which no civil or political right can be. But an absurd opinion concerning the king's hereditary right to the

crown does not prejudice one that is rational, and bottomed upon solid principles of law and policy. If all the absurd theories of lawyers and divines were to vitiate the objects in which they are conversant, we should have no law and no religion left in the world. But an absurd theory on one side of a question forms no justification for alleging a false fact, or promulgating mischievous maxims, on the other.

The second claim of the Revolution Society is "a right of cashiering their governors for *misconduct.*" Perhaps the apprehensions our ancestors entertained of forming such a precedent as that "of cashiering for misconduct," was the cause that the declaration of the act, which implied the abdication of King James, was, if it had any fault, rather too guarded, and too circumstantial.[21] But all this guard, and all this accumulation of circumstances, serves to show the spirit of caution which predominated in the national councils in a situation in which men irritated by oppression, and elevated by a triumph over it, are apt to abandon themselves to violent and extreme courses: it shows the anxiety of the great men who influenced the conduct of affairs at that great event to make the Revolution a parent of settlement, and not a nursery of future revolutions.

No government could stand a moment, if it could be blown down with anything so loose and indefinite as an opinion of "*misconduct.*" They who led at the Revolution grounded the virtual abdication of King James upon no such light and uncertain principle. They charged him with nothing less than a design, confirmed by a multitude of illegal overt acts, to *subvert the Protestant church and state,* and their *fundamental,* unquestionable laws and liberties: they charged him with having broken the *original contract* between king and people. This was more than *misconduct.* A grave and overruling necessity obliged them to take the step they took, and took with infinite reluctance, as under that most rigorous of all laws. Their trust for the future preservation of the constitution was not in future revolutions. The grand policy of all their regulations was to render it almost impracticable for any future sovereign to compel the states of the kingdom to have again recourse to those violent remedies. They left the crown what, in the eye and estimation of law, it had ever been, perfectly irresponsible. In order to lighten the crown still further, they aggravated responsibility on ministers of state. By the statute of the 1st of King William, sess. 2nd, called "*the act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for settling the succession to the crown,*" they enacted, that the ministers should serve the

crown on the terms of that declaration. They secured soon after the *frequent meetings of parliament,* by which the whole government would be under the constant inspection and active control of the popular representative and of the magnates of the kingdom. In the next great constitutional act, that of the 12th and 13th of King William, for the further limitation of the crown, and *better* securing the rights and liberties of the subject, they provided, "that no pardon under the great seal of England should be pleadable to an impeachment by the Commons in parliament."

21. * "That King James the Second, having endeavored to *subvert the constitution* of the kingdom by breaking the *original contract* between king and people, and, by the advice of Jesuits, and other wicked persons, having violated the *fundamental* laws, and *having withdrawn himself out of the kingdom,* hath *abdicated* the Government, and the throne is thereby *vacant*."

The rule laid down for government in the Declaration of Right, the constant inspection of parliament, the practical claim of impeachment, they thought infinitely a better security not only for their constitutional liberty, but against the vices of administration, than the reservation of a right so difficult in the practice, so uncertain in the issue, and often so mischievous in the consequences, as that of "cashiering their governors."

Dr. Price, in his sermon, condemns very properly the practice of gross, adulatory addresses to kings. Instead of this fulsome style, he proposes that his Majesty should be told, on occasions of congratulation, that "he is to consider himself as more properly the servant than the sovereign of his people."[22] For a compliment, this new form of address does not seem to be very soothing. Those who are servants in name, as well as in effect, do not like to be told of their situation, their duty, and their obligations. The slave, in the old play, tells his master, "*Hæc commemoratio est quasi exprobatio*."[23] It is not pleasant as compliment; it is not wholesome as instruction. After all, if the king were to bring himself to echo this new kind of address, to adopt it in terms, and even to take the appellation of Servant of the People as his royal style, how either he or we should be much mended by it, I cannot imagine. I have seen very assuming letters, signed, Your most obedient, humble servant. The proudest denomination that ever was endured on earth took a title of still greater humility than that which is now proposed for sovereigns by the Apostle of Liberty. Kings and nations were trampled upon by the foot of one calling himself "the Servant of

Servants"; and mandates for deposing sovereigns were sealed with the signet of "the Fisherman."

I should have considered all this as no more than a sort of flippant, vain discourse, in which, as in an unsavoury fume, several persons suffer the spirit of liberty to evaporate, if it were not plainly in support of the idea, and a part of the scheme, of "cashiering kings for misconduct." In that light it is worth some observation.

Kings, in one sense, are undoubtedly the servants of the people, because their power has no other rational end than that of the general advantage; but it is not true that they are, in the ordinary sense, (by our constitution at least,) anything like servants; the essence of whose situation is to obey the commands of some other, and to be removable at pleasure.

22. * [*Discourse on the Love of our Country,* by Dr. Price], pp. 22–24.

23. "Your recounting the circumstances looks like a reproach for ingratitude." Terence, *The Lady of Andros,* I, 1, 45.

But the king of Great Britain obeys no other person; all other persons are individually, and collectively too, under him, and owe to him a legal obedience. The law, which knows neither to flatter nor to insult, calls this high magistrate, not our servant, as this humble divine calls him, but "*our sovereign Lord the king*"; and we, on our parts, have learned to speak only the primitive language of the law, and not the confused jargon of their Babylonian pulpits.

As he is not to obey us, but as we are to obey the law in him, our constitution has made no sort of provision toward rendering him, as a servant, in any degree responsible. Our constitution knows nothing of a magistrate like the *Justicia* of Arragon; nor of any court legally appointed, nor of any process legally settled, for submitting the king to the responsibility belonging to all servants.[24] In this he is not distinguished from the Commons and the Lords; who, in their several public capacities, can never be called to an account for their conduct; although the Revolution Society chooses to assert, in direct opposition to one of the wisest and most beautiful parts of our constitution, that "a king is no more than the first servant of the public, created by it, *and responsible to it.*"

Ill would our ancestors at the Revolution have deserved their fame for wisdom, if they had found no security for their freedom, but in rendering

their government feeble in its operations and precarious in its tenure; if they had been able to contrive no better remedy against arbitrary power than civil confusion. Let these gentlemen state who that *representative* public is to whom they will affirm the king, as a servant, to be responsible. It will be then time enough for me to produce to them the positive statute law which affirms that he is not.

The ceremony of cashiering kings, of which these gentlemen talk so much at their ease, can rarely, if ever, be performed without force. It then becomes a case of war, and not of constitution. Laws are commanded to hold their tongues amongst arms; and tribunals fall to the ground with the peace they are no longer able to uphold. The Revolution of 1688 was obtained by a just war, in the only case in which any war, and much more a civil war, can be just. "Justa bella quibus *necessaria.*"[25] The question of dethroning, or, if these gentlemen like the phrase better, "cashiering kings," will always be, as it has always been, an extraordinary question of state, and wholly out of the law; a question (like all other questions of state) of dispositions, and of means, and of probable consequences, rather than of positive rights.

24. *Justicia* of Arragon: the equivalent of a chief justice
25. "That war is just which is necessary." Livy, *History of Rome,* IX, 1.

As it was not made for common abuses, so it is not to be agitated by common minds. The speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event, which determines it. Governments must be abused and deranged indeed, before it can be thought of; and the prospect of the future must be as bad as the experience of the past. When things are in that lamentable condition, the nature of the disease is to indicate the remedy to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities this critical, ambiguous, bitter potion to a distempered state. Times, and occasions, and provocations, will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case; the irritable, from sensibility to oppression; the highminded, from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands; the brave and bold, from the love of honourable danger in a generous cause: but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good.

The third head of right, asserted by the pulpit of the Old Jewry, namely, the "right to form a government for ourselves," has, at least, as little countenance from anything done at the Revolution, either in precedent or principle, as the two first of their claims. The Revolution was made to preserve our *ancient,* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *ancient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty. If you are desirous of knowing the spirit of our constitution, and the policy which predominated in that great period which has secured it to this hour, pray look for both in our histories, in our records, in our acts of parliament, and journals of parliament, and not in the sermons of the Old Jewry, and the after-dinner toasts of the Revolution Society. In the former you will find other ideas and another language. Such a claim is as ill-suited to our temper and wishes as it is unsupported by any appearance of authority. The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers.* Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any scion alien to the nature of the original plant. All the reformations we have hitherto made have proceeded upon the principle of reverence to antiquity; and I hope, nay I am persuaded, that all those which possibly may be made hereafter, will be carefully formed upon analogical precedent, authority, and example.

Our oldest reformation is that of Magna Charta. You will see that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of our law, and indeed all the great men who follow him, to Blackstone, are industrious to prove the pedigree of our liberties.[26] They endeavour to prove, that the ancient charter, the Magna Charta of King John, was connected with another positive charter from Henry I., and that both the one and the other were nothing more than a reaffirmance of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom. In the matter of fact, for the greater part, these authors appear to be in the right; perhaps not always; but if the lawyers mistake in some particulars, it proves my position still the more strongly; because it demonstrates the powerful prepossession towards antiquity, with which the minds of all our lawyers and legislators, and of all the people whom they wish to influence, have been always filled; and the stationary policy of this kingdom in considering their most sacred rights and franchises as an *inheritance.*

In the famous law of the 3rd of Charles I., called the *Petition of Right,* the parliament says to the king, "Your subjects have *inherited* this freedom," claiming their franchises not on abstract principles "as the rights of men," but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers. Selden, and the other profoundly learned men, who drew this Petition of Right, were as well acquainted, at least, with all the general theories concerning the "rights of men," as any of the discoursers in our pulpits, or on your tribune; full as well as Dr. Price, or as the Abbé Sieyes. But, for reasons worthy of that practical wisdom which superseded their theoretic science, they preferred this positive, recorded, *hereditary* title to all which can be dear to the man and the citizen, to that vague speculative right, which exposed their sure inheritance to be scrambled for and torn to pieces by every wild, litigious spirit.

The same policy pervades all the laws which have since been made for the preservation of our liberties. In the 1st of William and Mary, in the famous statute, called the Declaration of Right, the two Houses utter not a syllable of "a right to frame a government for themselves." You will see, that their whole care was to secure the religion, laws, and liberties, that had been long possessed, and had been lately endangered. "Taking into their most serious consideration the *best* means for making such an establishment, that their religion, laws, and liberties might not be in danger of being again subverted," they auspicate all their proceedings, by stating as some of those *best* means, "in the *first place*" to do "as their *ancestors in like cases have usually* done for vindicating their *ancient* rights and liberties, to *declare*;"—and then they pray the king and queen, "that it may be *declared* and enacted, that *all and singular* the rights and liberties *asserted and declared,* are the true *ancient* and indubitable rights and liberties of the people of this kingdom."[27]

26. * See Blackstone's Magna Charta, printed at Oxford, 1759.

You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom, without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves a unity in so

great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors.

This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper, and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors. Besides, the people of England well know, that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free; but it secures what it acquires. Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims, are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever. By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges, in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives. The institutions of policy, the goods of fortune, the gifts of providence, are handed down to us, and from us, in the same course and order. Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain, we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy.

27. * 1 W. and M.

In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth

of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.

Through the same plan of a conformity to nature in our artificial institutions, and by calling in the aid of her unerring and powerful instincts, to fortify the fallible and feeble contrivances of our reason, we have derived several other, and those no small benefits, from considering our liberties in the light of an inheritance. Always acting as if in the presence of canonized forefathers, the spirit of freedom, leading in itself to misrule and excess, is tempered with an awful gravity. This idea of a liberal descent inspires us with a sense of habitual native dignity, which prevents that upstart insolence almost inevitably adhering to and disgracing those who are the first acquirers of any distinction. By this means our liberty becomes a noble freedom. It carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences, and titles. We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men; on account of their age, and on account of those from whom they are descended. All your sophisters cannot produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course that we have pursued, who have chosen our nature rather than our speculations, our breasts rather than our inventions, for the great conservatories and magazines of our rights and privileges.

You might, if you pleased, have profited of our example, and have given to your recovered freedom a correspondent dignity. Your privileges, though discontinued, were not lost to memory. Your constitution, it is true, whilst you were out of possession, suffered waste and dilapidation; but you possessed in some parts the walls, and, in all, the foundations, of a noble and venerable castle. You might have repaired those walls; you might have built on those old foundations. Your constitution was suspended before it was perfected; but you had the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished. In your old states you possessed that variety of parts corresponding with the various descriptions of which your community was happily composed; you had all that combination, and all that opposition of interests, you had that action and counteraction, which, in the natural and in the political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers, draws out the harmony of the universe. These opposed and conflicting interests, which you considered as so great a blemish in your old and in our

present constitution, interpose a salutary check to all precipitate resolutions. They render deliberation a matter not of choice, but of necessity; they make all change a subject of *compromise,* which naturally begets moderation; they produce *temperaments* preventing the sore evil of harsh, crude, unqualified reformations; and rendering all the headlong exertions of arbitrary power, in the few or in the many, for ever impracticable. Through that diversity of members and interests, general liberty had as many securities as there were separate views in the several orders; whilst by pressing down the whole by the weight of a real monarchy, the separate parts would have been prevented from warping, and starting from their allotted places.

You had all these advantages in your ancient states; but you chose to act as if you had never been moulded into civil society, and had everything to begin anew. You began ill, because you began by despising everything that belonged to you. You set up your trade without a capital. If the last generations of your country appeared without much lustre in your eyes, you might have passed them by, and derived your claims from a more early race of ancestors. Under a pious predilection for those ancestors, your imaginations would have realized in them a standard of virtue and wisdom, beyond the vulgar practice of the hour: and you would have risen with the example to whose imitation you aspired. Respecting your forefathers, you would have been taught to respect yourselves. You would not have chosen to consider the French as a people of yesterday, as a nation of low-born servile wretches until the emancipating year of 1789. In order to furnish, at the expense of your honour, an excuse to your apologists here for several enormities of yours, you would not have been content to be represented as a gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage, and therefore to be pardoned for your abuse of the liberty to which you were not accustomed, and ill fitted. Would it not, my worthy friend, have been wiser to have you thought, what I, for one, always thought you, a generous and gallant nation, long misled to your disadvantage by your high and romantic sentiments of fidelity, honour, and loyalty; that events had been unfavourable to you, but that you were not enslaved through any illiberal or servile disposition; that in your most devoted submission, you were actuated by a principle of public spirit, and that it was your country you worshipped, in the person of your king? Had you made it to be understood, that in the delusion of this amiable error you had gone further

than your wise ancestors; that you were resolved to resume your ancient privileges, whilst you preserved the spirit of your ancient and your recent loyalty and honour; or if, diffident of yourselves, and not clearly discerning the almost obliterated constitution of your ancestors, you had looked to your neighbours in this land, who had kept alive the ancient principles and models of the old common law of Europe meliorated and adapted to its present state—by following wise examples you would have given new examples of wisdom to the world. You would have rendered the cause of liberty venerable in the eyes of every worthy mind in every nation. You would have shamed despotism from the earth, by showing that freedom was not only reconcilable, but, as when well disciplined it is, auxiliary to law. You would have had an unoppressive but a productive revenue. You would have had a flourishing commerce to feed it. You would have had a free constitution; a potent monarchy; a disciplined army; a reformed and venerated clergy; a mitigated but spirited nobility, to lead your virtue, not to overlay it; you would have had a liberal order of commons, to emulate and to recruit that nobility; you would have had a protected, satisfied, laborious, and obedient people, taught to seek and to recognise the happiness that is to be found by virtue in all conditions; in which consists the true moral equality of mankind, and not in that monstrous fiction, which, by inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walk of laborious life, serves only to aggravate and embitter that real inequality, which it never can remove; and which the order of civil life establishes as much for the benefit of those whom it must leave in an humble state, as those whom it is able to exalt to a condition more splendid, but not more happy. You had a smooth and easy career of felicity and glory laid open to you, beyond anything recorded in the history of the world; but you have shown that difficulty is good for man.

Compute your gains: see what is got by those extravagant and presumptuous speculations which have taught your leaders to despise all their predecessors, and all their contemporaries, and even to despise themselves, until the moment in which they became truly despicable. By following those false lights, France has bought undisguised calamities at a higher price than any nation has purchased the most unequivocal blessings! France has bought poverty by crime! France has not sacrificed her virtue to her interest, but she has abandoned her interest, that she might prostitute her virtue. All other nations have begun the fabric of a new government, or the

reformation of an old, by establishing originally, or by enforcing with greater exactness, some rites or other of religion. All other people have laid the foundations of civil freedom in severer manners, and a system of a more austere and masculine morality. France, when she let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the licence of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners, and of an insolent irreligion in opinions and practices; and has extended through all ranks of life, as if she were communicating some privilege, or laying open some secluded benefit, all the unhappy corruptions that usually were the disease of wealth and power. This is one of the new principles of equality in France.

France, by the perfidy of her leaders, has utterly disgraced the tone of lenient council in the cabinets of princes, and disarmed it of its most potent topics. She has sanctified the dark, suspicious maxims of tyrannous distrust; and taught kings to tremble at (what will hereafter be called) the delusive plausibilities of moral politicians. Sovereigns will consider those, who advise them to place an unlimited confidence in their people, as subverters of their thrones; as traitors who aim at their destruction, by leading their easy good-nature, under specious pretences, to admit combinations of bold and faithless men into a participation of their power. This alone (if there were nothing else) is an irreparable calamity to you and to mankind. Remember that your parliament of Paris told your king, that, in calling the states together, he had nothing to fear but the prodigal excess of their zeal in providing for the support of the throne. It is right that these men should hide their heads. It is right that they should bear their part in the ruin which their counsel has brought on their sovereign and their country. Such sanguine declarations tend to lull authority asleep; to encourage it rashly to engage in perilous adventures of untried policy; to neglect those provisions, preparations, and precautions, which distinguish benevolence from imbecility; and without which no man can answer for the salutary effect of any abstract plan of government or of freedom. For want of these, they have seen the medicine of the state corrupted into its poison. They have seen the French rebel against a mild and lawful monarch, with more fury, outrage, and insult, than ever any people has been known to rise against the most illegal usurper, or the most sanguinary tyrant. Their resistance was made to concession; their revolt was from protection; their blow was aimed at a hand holding out graces, favours, and immunities.

This was unnatural. The rest is in order. They have found their punishment in their success. Laws overturned; tribunals subverted; industry without vigour; commerce expiring; the revenue unpaid, yet the people impoverished; a church pillaged, and a state not relieved; civil and military anarchy made the constitution of the kingdom; everything human and divine sacrificed to the idol of public credit, and national bankruptcy the consequence; and, to crown all, the paper securities of new, precarious, tottering power, the discredited paper securities of impoverished fraud and beggared rapine, held out as a currency for the support of an empire, in lieu of the two great recognised species that represent the lasting, conventional credit of mankind, which disappeared and hid themselves in the earth from whence they came, when the principle of property, whose creatures and representatives they are, was systematically subverted.

Were all these dreadful things necessary? Were they the inevitable results of the desperate struggle of determined patriots, compelled to wade through blood and tumult, to the quiet shore of a tranquil and prosperous liberty? No! nothing like it. The fresh ruins of France, which shock our feelings wherever we can turn our eyes, are not the devastation of civil war; they are the sad but instructive monuments of rash and ignorant counsel in time of profound peace. They are the display of inconsiderate and presumptuous, because unresisted and irresistible, authority. The persons who have thus squandered away the precious treasure of their crimes, the persons who have made this prodigal and wild waste of public evils, (the last stake reserved for the ultimate ransom of the state,) have met in their progress with little, or rather with no opposition at all. Their whole march was more like a triumphal procession, than the progress of a war. Their pioneers have gone before them, and demolished and laid everything level at their feet. Not one drop of *their* blood have they shed in the cause of the country they have ruined. They have made no sacrifices to their projects of greater consequence than their shoe-buckles, whilst they were imprisoning their king, murdering their fellow-citizens, and bathing in tears, and plunging in poverty and distress, thousands of worthy men and worthy families. Their cruelty has not even been the base result of fear. It has been the effect of their sense of perfect safety, in authorizing treasons, robberies, rapes, assassinations, slaughters, and burnings, throughout their harassed land. But the cause of all was plain from the beginning.

This unforced choice, this fond election of evil, would appear perfectly unaccountable, if we did not consider the composition of the National Assembly: I do not mean its formal constitution, which, as it now stands, is exceptionable enough, but the materials of which, in a great measure, it is composed, which is of ten thousand times greater consequence than all the formalities in the world. If we were to know nothing of this assembly but by its title and function, no colours could paint to the imagination anything more venerable. In that light the mind of an inquirer, subdued by such an awful image as that of the virtue and wisdom of a whole people collected into a focus, would pause and hesitate in condemning things even of the very worst aspect. Instead of blameable, they would appear only mysterious. But no name, no power, no function, no artificial institution whatsoever, can make the men of whom any system of authority is composed, any other than God, and nature, and education, and their habits of life have made them. Capacities beyond these the people have not to give. Virtue and wisdom may be the objects of their choice; but their choice confers neither the one nor the other on those upon whom they lay their ordaining hands. They have not the engagement of nature, they have not the promise of revelation, for any such powers.

After I had read over the list of the persons and descriptions elected into the *Tiers Etat,* nothing which they afterwards did could appear astonishing. Among them, indeed, I saw some of known rank; some of shining talents; but of any practical experience in the state, not one man was to be found. The best were only men of theory. But whatever the distinguished few may have been, it is the substance and mass of the body which constitutes its character, and must finally determine its direction. In all bodies, those who will lead, must also, in a considerable degree, follow. They must conform their propositions to the taste, talent, and disposition, of those whom they wish to conduct: therefore, if an assembly is viciously or feebly composed in a very great part of it, nothing but such a supreme degree of virtue as very rarely appears in the world, and for that reason cannot enter into calculation, will prevent the men of talent disseminated through it from becoming only the expert instruments of absurd projects! If, what is the more likely event, instead of that unusual degree of virtue, they should be actuated by sinister ambition, and a lust of meretricious glory, then the feeble part of the assembly, to whom at first they conform, becomes in its turn the dupe and instrument of their designs. In this political traffic, the

leaders will be obliged to bow to the ignorance of their followers, and the followers to become subservient to the worst designs of their leaders.

To secure any degree of sobriety in the propositions made by the leaders in any public assembly, they ought to respect, in some degree perhaps to fear, those whom they conduct. To be led any otherwise than blindly, the followers must be qualified, if not for actors, at least for judges; they must also be judges of natural weight and authority. Nothing can secure a steady and moderate conduct in such assemblies, but that the body of them should be respectably composed, in point of condition in life, of permanent property, of education, and of such habits as enlarge and liberalize the understanding.

In the calling of the states-general of France, the first thing that struck me, was a great departure from the ancient course. I found the representation for the third estate composed of six hundred persons. They were equal in number to the representatives of both the other orders. If the orders were to act separately, the number would not, beyond the consideration of the expense, be of much moment. But when it became apparent that the three orders were to be melted down into one, the policy and necessary effect of this numerous representation became obvious.[28] A very small desertion from either of the other two orders must throw the power of both into the hands of the third. In fact, the whole power of the state was soon resolved into that body. Its due composition became therefore of infinitely the greater importance.

Judge, Sir, of my surprise, when I found that a very great proportion of the assembly (a majority, I believe, of the members who attended) was composed of practitioners in the law. It was composed, not of distinguished magistrates, who had given pledges to their country of their science, prudence, and integrity; not of leading advocates, the glory of the bar; not of renowned professors in universities;—but for the far greater part, as it must in such a number, of the inferior, unlearned, mechanical, merely instrumental members of the profession. There were distinguished exceptions; but the general composition was of obscure provincial advocates, of stewards of petty local jurisdictions, country attornies, notaries, and the whole train of the ministers of municipal litigation, the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation. From the moment I read the list, I saw distinctly, and very nearly as it has happened, all that was to follow.

The degree of estimation in which any profession is held becomes the standard of the estimation in which the professors hold themselves. Whatever the personal merits of many individual lawyers might have been, and in many it was undoubtedly very considerable, in that military kingdom no part of the profession had been much regarded, except the highest of all, who often united to their professional offices great family splendour, and were invested with great power and authority. These certainly were highly respected, and even with no small degree of awe. The next rank was not much esteemed; the mechanical part was in a very low degree of repute.

Whenever the supreme authority is vested in a body so composed, it must evidently produce the consequences of supreme authority placed in the hands of men not taught habitually to respect themselves; who had no previous fortune in character at stake; who could not be expected to bear with moderation, or to conduct with discretion, a power, which they themselves, more than any others, must be surprised to find in their hands.

28. The Estates General was organized into the First Estate of the Clergy, the Second Estate of the Nobility, and the Third Estate comprehending everyone else in the kingdom. As the elections for the Estates General were organized in 1788, the French monarchy had decided that the Third Estate would be allowed to have twice as many members as either of the other estates. Consequently, when in June 1789 the Estates General transformed itself into the National Assembly, the former Third Estate had a practical working majority assuming even a small number of clergy or nobles joined them, and such was indeed the case.

Who could flatter himself that these men, suddenly, and, as it were, by enchantment, snatched from the humblest rank of subordination, would not be intoxicated with their unprepared greatness? Who could conceive that men, who are habitually meddling, daring, subtle, active, of litigious dispositions and unquiet minds would easily fall back into their old condition of obscure contention, and laborious, low, and unprofitable chicane. Who could doubt but that, at any expense to the state, of which they understood nothing, they must pursue their private interests which they understood but too well? It was not an event depending on chance, or contingency. It was inevitable; it was necessary; it was planted in the nature of things. They must *join* (if their capacity did not permit them to *lead*) in any project which could procure to them a *litigious constitution;* which could lay open to them those innumerable lucrative jobs, which follow in the train of all great convulsions and revolutions in the state, and particularly in all great and violent permutations of property. Was it to be

expected that they would attend to the stability of property, whose existence had always depended upon whatever rendered property questionable, ambiguous, and insecure? Their objects would be enlarged with their elevation, but their disposition and habits, and mode of accomplishing their designs, must remain the same.

Well! but these men were to be tempered and restrained by other descriptions, of more sober and more enlarged understandings. Were they then to be awed by the supereminent authority and awful dignity of a handful of country clowns, who have seats in that assembly, some of whom are said not to be able to read and write? and by not a greater number of traders, who, though somewhat more instructed and more conspicuous in the order of society, had never known anything beyond their counting-house. No! both these descriptions were more formed to be overborne and swayed by the intrigues and artifices of lawyers, than to become their counterpoise. With such a dangerous disproportion, the whole must needs be governed by them. To the faculty of law was joined a pretty considerable proportion of the faculty of medicine. This faculty had not, any more than that of the law, possessed in France its just estimation. Its professors, therefore, must have the qualities of men not habituated to sentiments of dignity. But supposing they had ranked as they ought to do, and as with us they do actually, the sides of sick beds are not the academies for forming statesmen and legislators. Then came the dealers in stocks and funds, who must be eager, at any expense, to change their ideal paper wealth for the more solid substance of land. To these were joined men of other descriptions, from whom as little knowledge of, or attention to, the interests of a great state was to be expected, and as little regard to the stability of any institution; men formed to be instruments, not controls. Such in general was the composition of the *Tiers Etat* in the National Assembly; in which was scarcely to be perceived the slightest traces of what we call the natural landed interest of the country.

We know that the British House of Commons, without shutting its doors to any merit in any class, is, by the sure operation of adequate causes, filled with everything illustrious in rank, in descent, in hereditary and in acquired opulence, in cultivated talents, in military, civil, naval, and politic distinction, that the country can afford. But supposing, what hardly can be supposed as a case, that the House of Commons should be composed in the same manner with the *Tiers Etat* in France, would this dominion of chicane

be borne with patience, or even conceived without horror? God forbid I should insinuate anything derogatory to that profession, which is another priesthood, administrating the rights of sacred justice. But whilst I revere men in the functions which belong to them, and would do as much as one man can do to prevent their exclusion from any, I cannot, to flatter them, give the lie to nature. They are good and useful in the composition; they must be mischievous if they preponderate so as virtually to become the whole. Their very excellence in their peculiar functions may be far from a qualification for others. It cannot escape observation, that when men are too much confined to professional and faculty habits, and as it were inveterate in the recurrent employment of that narrow circle, they are rather disabled than qualified for whatever depends on the knowledge of mankind, on experience in mixed affairs, on a comprehensive, connected view of the various, complicated, external and internal interests, which go to the formation of that multifarious thing called a state.

After all, if the House of Commons were to have a wholly professional and faculty composition, what is the power of the House of Commons, circumscribed and shut in by the immoveable barriers of laws, usages, positive rules of doctrine and practice, counterpoised by the House of Lords, and every moment of its existence at the discretion of the crown to continue, prorogue, or dissolve us? The power of the House of Commons, direct or indirect, is indeed great; and long may it be able to preserve its greatness, and the spirit belonging to true greatness, at the full; and it will do so, as long as it can keep the breakers of law in India from becoming the makers of law for England. The power, however, of the House of Commons, when least diminished, is as a drop of water in the ocean, compared to that residing in a settled majority of your National Assembly. That assembly, since the destruction of the orders, has no fundamental law, no strict convention, no respected usage to restrain it. Instead of finding themselves obliged to conform to a fixed constitution, they have a power to make a constitution which shall conform to their designs. Nothing in heaven or upon earth can serve as a control on them. What ought to be the heads, the hearts, the dispositions, that are qualified, or that dare, not only to make laws under a fixed constitution, but at one heat to strike out totally a new constitution for a great kingdom, and in every part of it, from the monarch on the throne to the vestry of a parish? But—"*fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*"[29] In such a state of unbounded power for undefined

and undefinable purposes, the evil of a moral and almost physical inaptitude of the man to the function must be the greatest we can conceive to happen in the management of human affairs.

Having considered the composition of the third estate as it stood in its original frame, I took a view of the representatives of the clergy. There too it appeared, that full as little regard was had to the general security of property, or to the aptitude of the deputies for their public purposes, in the principles of their election. That election was so contrived, as to send a very large proportion of mere country curates to the great and arduous work of new-modelling a state; men who never had seen the state so much as in a picture; men who knew nothing of the world beyond the bounds of an obscure village; who, immersed in hopeless poverty, could regard all property, whether secular or ecclesiastical, with no other eye than that of envy; among whom must be many who, for the smallest hope of the meanest dividend in plunder, would readily join in any attempts upon a body of wealth, in which they could hardly look to have any share, except in a general scramble. Instead of balancing the power of the active chicaners in the other assembly, these curates must necessarily become the active coadjutors, or at best the passive instruments, of those by whom they had been habitually guided in their petty village concerns. They too could hardly be the most conscientious of their kind, who presuming upon their incompetent understanding, could intrigue for a trust which led them from their natural relation to their flocks, and their natural spheres of action, to undertake the regeneration of kingdoms. This preponderating weight, being added to the force of the body of chicane in the *Tiers Etat,* completed that momentum of ignorance, rashness, presumption, and lust of plunder, which nothing has been able to resist.

29. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism,* III, 1, 66.

To observing men it must have appeared from the beginning, that the majority of the Third Estate, in conjunction with such a deputation from the clergy as I have described, whilst it pursued the destruction of the nobility, would inevitably become subservient to the worst designs of individuals in that class. In the spoil and humiliation of their own order these individuals would possess a sure fund for the pay of their new followers. To squander away the objects which made the happiness of their fellows, would be to

them no sacrifice at all. Turbulent, discontented men of quality, in proportion as they are puffed up with personal pride and arrogance, generally despise their own order. One of the first symptoms they discover of a selfish and mischievous ambition, is a profligate disregard of a dignity which they partake with others. To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind. The interest of that portion of social arrangement is a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and as none but bad men would justify it in abuse, none but traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage.

There were in the time of our civil troubles in England, (I do not know whether you have any such in your assembly in France,) several persons, like the then Earl of Holland, who by themselves or their families had brought an odium on the throne, by the prodigal dispensation of its bounties toward them, who afterwards joined in the rebellions arising from the discontents of which they were themselves the cause; men who helped to subvert that throne to which they owed, some of them, their existence, others all that power which they employed to ruin their benefactor. If any bounds are set to the rapacious demands of that sort of people, or that others are permitted to partake in the objects they would engross, revenge and envy soon fill up the craving void that is left in their avarice. Confounded by the complication of distempered passions, their reason is disturbed; their views become vast and perplexed; to others inexplicable; to themselves uncertain. They find, on all sides, bounds to their unprincipled ambition in any fixed order of things. But in the fog and haze of confusion all is enlarged, and appears without any limit.

When men of rank sacrifice all ideas of dignity to an ambition without a distinct object, and work with low instruments and for low ends, the whole composition becomes low and base. Does not something like this now appear in France? Does it not produce something ignoble and inglorious? a kind of meanness in all the prevalent policy? a tendency in all that is done to lower along with individuals all the dignity and importance of the state? Other revolutions have been conducted by persons, who, whilst they attempted or affected changes in the commonwealth, sanctified their ambition by advancing the dignity of the people whose peace they troubled. They had long views. They aimed at the rule, not at the destruction, of their

country. They were men of great civil and great military talents, and if the terror, the ornament of their age. They were not like Jew brokers, contending with each other who could best remedy with fraudulent circulation and depreciated paper the wretchedness and ruin brought on their country by their degenerate councils. The compliment made to one of the great bad men of the old stamp (Cromwell) by his kinsman, a favourite poet of that time, shows what it was he proposed, and what indeed to a great degree he accomplished, in the success of his ambition:

> Still as *you* rise, the *state* exalted too,
> Finds no distemper whilst 'tis changed by *you;*
> Changed like the world's great scene, when without noise
> The rising sun night's *vulgar* lights destroys.[30]

These disturbers were not so much like men usurping power, as asserting their natural place in society. Their rising was to illuminate and beautify the world. Their conquest over their competitors was by outshining them. The hand that, like a destroying angel, smote the country, communicated to it the force and energy under which it suffered. I do not say, (God forbid,) I do not say, that the virtues of such men were to be taken as a balance to their crimes: but they were some corrective to their effects. Such was, as I said, our Cromwell. Such were your whole race of Guises, Condés, and Colignis. Such the Richelieus, who in more quiet times acted in the spirit of a civil war. Such, as better men, and in a less dubious cause, were your Henry the Fourth and your Sully, though nursed in civil confusions, and not wholly without some of their taint. It is a thing to be wondered at, to see how very soon France, when she had a moment to respire, recovered and emerged from the longest and most dreadful civil war that ever was known in any nation. Why? Because among all their massacres, they had not slain the *mind* in their country. A conscious dignity, a noble pride, a generous sense of glory and emulation, was not extinguished. On the contrary, it was kindled and inflamed. The organs also of the state, however shattered, existed. All the prizes of honour and virtue, all the rewards, all the distinctions remained. But your present confusion, like a palsy, has attacked the fountain of life itself. Every person in your country, in a situation to be actuated by a principle of honour, is disgraced and degraded, and can entertain no sensation of life, except in a mortified and humiliated indignation.

30. Edmund Waller, “Panegyric to the Lord Protector,” in *Works* (London: J. Tonson, 1730), 119.

But this generation will quickly pass away. The next generation of the nobility will resemble the artificers and clowns, and money-jobbers, usurers, and Jews, who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters. Believe me, Sir, those who attempt to level, never equalise. In all societies, consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some description must be uppermost. The levellers therefore only change and pervert the natural order of things; they load the edifice of society, by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground. The association of tailors and carpenters, of which the republic (of Paris, for instance) is composed, cannot be equal to the situation, into which, by the worst of usurpations, an usurpation on the prerogatives of nature, you attempt to force them.

The Chancellor of France at the opening of the states, said, in a tone of oratorical flourish, that all occupations were honourable. If he meant only, that no honest employment was disgraceful, he would not have gone beyond the truth. But in asserting that anything is honourable, we imply some distinction in its favour. The occupation of a hair-dresser, or of a working tallow-chandler, cannot be a matter of honour to any person—to say nothing of a number of other more servile employments. Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression, if such as they, either individually or collectively, are permitted to rule. In this you think you are combating prejudice, but you are at war with nature.[31]

31. * Ecclesiasticus, chap. xxxviii. verse 24, 25. “The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure: and he that hath little business shall become wise.”—“How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad; that driveth oxen; and is occupied in their labours; and whose talk is of bullocks?”

Ver. 27. “So every carpenter and work-master that laboureth night and day,” etc.

Ver. 33. “They shall not be sought for in public counsel, nor sit high in the congregation: they shall not sit on the judge’s seat, nor understand the sentence of judgment; they cannot declare justice and judgment, and they shall not be found where parables are spoken.”

Ver. 34. “But they will maintain the state of the world.”

I do not determine whether this book be canonical, as the Gallican church (till lately) has considered it, or apocryphal, as here it is taken. I am sure it contains a great deal of sense and truth.

I do not, my dear Sir, conceive you to be of that sophistical, captious spirit, or of that uncandid dulness, as to require, for every general observation or

sentiment, an explicit detail of the correctives and exceptions, which reason will presume to be included in all the general propositions which come from reasonable men. You do not imagine, that I wish to confine power, authority, and distinction to blood, and names, and titles. No, Sir. There is no qualification for government but virtue and wisdom, actual or presumptive. Wherever they are actually found, they have, in whatever state, condition, profession, or trade, the passport of Heaven to human place and honour. Woe to the country which would madly and impiously reject the service of the talents and virtues, civil, military, or religious, that are given to grace and to serve it; and would condemn to obscurity everything formed to diffuse lustre and glory around a state! Woe to that country too, that, passing into the opposite extreme, considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid, mercenary occupation, as a preferable title to command! Everything ought to be open; but not indifferently to every man. No rotation; no appointment by lot; no mode of election operating in the spirit of sortition, or rotation, can be generally good in a government conversant in extensive objects. Because they have no tendency, direct or indirect, to select the man with a view to the duty, or to accommodate the one to the other. I do not hesitate to say, that the road to eminence and power, from obscure condition, ought not to be made too easy, nor a thing too much of course. If rare merit be the rarest of all rare things, it ought to pass through some sort of probation. The temple of honour ought to be seated on an eminence. If it be opened through virtue, let it be remembered too, that virtue is never tried but by some difficulty and some struggle.

Nothing is a due and adequate representation of a state, that does not represent its ability, as well as its property. But as ability is a vigorous and active principle, and as property is sluggish, inert, and timid, it never can be safe from the invasions of ability, unless it be, out of all proportion, predominant in the representation. It must be represented too in great masses of accumulation, or it is not rightly protected. The characteristic essence of property, formed out of the combined principles of its acquisition and conservation, is to be *unequal.* The great masses therefore which excite envy, and tempt rapacity, must be put out of the possibility of danger. Then they form a natural rampart about the lesser properties in all their gradations. The same quantity of property, which is by the natural course of things divided among many, has not the same operation. Its defensive

power is weakened as it is diffused. In this diffusion each man's portion is less than what, in the eagerness of his desires, he may flatter himself to obtain by dissipating the accumulations of others. The plunder of the few would indeed give but a share inconceivably small in the distribution to the many. But the many are not capable of making this calculation; and those who lead them to rapine never intend this distribution.

The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice. The possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction which attends hereditary possession, (as most concerned in it,) are the natural securities for this transmission. With us the House of Peers is formed upon this principle. It is wholly composed of hereditary property and hereditary distinction; and made therefore the third of the legislature; and, in the last event, the sole judge of all property in all its subdivisions. The House of Commons too, though not necessarily, yet in fact, is always so composed, in the far greater part. Let those large proprietors be what they will, and they have their chance of being amongst the best, they are, at the very worst, the ballast in the vessel of the commonwealth. For though hereditary wealth, and the rank which goes with it, are too much idolized by creeping sycophants, and the blind, abject admirers of power, they are too rashly slighted in shallow speculations of the petulant, assuming, short-sighted coxcombs of philosophy. Some decent, regulated pre-eminence, some preference (not exclusive appropriation) given to birth, is neither unnatural, nor unjust, nor impolitic.

It is said, that twenty-four millions ought to prevail over two hundred thousand. True; if the constitution of a kingdom be a problem of arithmetic. This sort of discourse does well enough with the lamp-post for its second: to men who *may* reason calmly, it is ridiculous. The will of the many, and their interest, must very often differ; and great will be the difference when they make an evil choice. A government of five hundred country attornies and obscure curates is not good for twenty-four millions of men, though it were chosen by eight and forty millions; nor is it the better for being guided by a dozen of persons of quality, who have betrayed their trust in order to obtain that power. At present, you seem in everything to have strayed out of the high road of nature. The property of France does not govern it. Of

course property is destroyed, and rational liberty has no existence. All you have got for the present is a paper circulation, and a stock-jobbing constitution: and, as to the future, do you seriously think that the territory of France, upon the republican system of eighty-three independent municipalities, (to say nothing of the parts that compose them,) can ever be governed as one body, or can ever be set in motion by the impulse of one mind? When the National Assembly has completed its work, it will have accomplished its ruin. These commonwealths will not long bear a state of subjection to the republic of Paris. They will not bear that this one body should monopolize the captivity of the king, and the dominion over the assembly calling itself national. Each will keep its own portion of the spoil of the church to itself; and it will not suffer either that spoil, or the more just fruits of their industry, or the natural produce of their soil, to be sent to swell the insolence, or pamper the luxury, of the mechanics of Paris. In this they will see none of the equality, under the pretence of which they have been tempted to throw off their allegiance to their sovereign, as well as the ancient constitution of their country. There can be no capital city in such a constitution as they have lately made. They have forgot, that when they framed democratic governments, they had virtually dismembered their country. The person, whom they persevere in calling king, has not power left to him by the hundredth part sufficient to hold together this collection of republics. The republic of Paris will endeavour indeed to complete the debauchery of the army, and illegally to perpetuate the assembly, without resort to its constituents, as the means of continuing its despotism. It will make efforts, by becoming the heart of a boundless paper circulation, to draw everything to itself; but in vain. All this policy in the end will appear as feeble as it is now violent.

If this be your actual situation, compared to the situation to which you were called, as it were by the voice of God and man, I cannot find it in my heart to congratulate you on the choice you have made, or the success which has attended your endeavours. I can as little recommend to any other nation a conduct grounded on such principles, and productive of such effects. That I must leave to those who can see farther into your affairs than I am able to do, and who best know how far your actions are favourable to their designs. The gentlemen of the Revolution Society, who were so early in their congratulations, appear to be strongly of opinion that there is some scheme of politics relative to this country, in which your proceedings may,

in some way, be useful. For your Dr. Price, who seems to have speculated himself into no small degree of fervour upon this subject, addresses his auditory in the following very remarkable words: “I cannot conclude without recalling *particularly* to your recollection a consideration which I have *more than once alluded to,* and which probably your thoughts have *been all along anticipating;* a consideration with which my *mind is impressed more than I can express.* I mean the consideration of the *favourableness of the present times to all exertions in the cause of liberty.*”

It is plain that the mind of this *political* preacher was at the time big with some extraordinary design; and it is very probable that the thoughts of his audience, who understood him better than I do, did all along run before him in his reflection, and in the whole train of consequences to which it led.

Before I read that sermon, I really thought I had lived in a free country; and it was an error I cherished, because it gave me a greater liking to the country I lived in. I was indeed aware, that a jealous, ever-waking vigilance, to guard the treasure of our liberty, not only from invasion, but from decay and corruption, was our best wisdom, and our first duty. However, I considered that treasure rather as a possession to be secured, than as a prize to be contended for. I did not discern how the present time came to be so very favourable to all *exertions* in the cause of freedom. The present time differs from any other only by the circumstance of what is doing in France. If the example of that nation is to have an influence on this, I can easily conceive why some of their proceedings which have an unpleasant aspect, and are not quite reconcilable to humanity, generosity, good faith, and justice, are palliated with so much milky good-nature towards the actors, and borne with so much heroic fortitude towards the sufferers. It is certainly not prudent to discredit the authority of an example we mean to follow. But allowing this, we are led to a very natural question;—What is that cause of liberty, and what are those exertions in its favour, to which the example of France is so singularly auspicious? Is our monarchy to be annihilated, with all the laws, all the tribunals, and all the ancient corporations of the kingdom? Is every land-mark of the country to be done away in favour of a geometrical and arithmetical constitution? Is the House of Lords to be voted useless? Is episcopacy to be abolished? Are the church lands to be sold to Jews and jobbers; or given to bribe new-invented municipal republics into a participation in sacrilege? Are all the taxes to be voted grievances, and the revenue reduced to a patriotic contribution, or patriotic presents? Are silver

shoe-buckles to be substituted in the place of the land tax and the malt tax, for the support of the naval strength of this kingdom? Are all orders, ranks, and distinctions to be confounded, that out of universal anarchy, joined to national bankruptcy, three or four thousand democracies should be formed into eighty-three, and that they may all, by some sort of unknown attractive power, be organized into one? For this great end is the army to be seduced from its discipline and its fidelity, first by every kind of debauchery, and then by the terrible precedent of a donative in the increase of pay? Are the curates to be seduced from their bishops, by holding out to them the delusive hope of a dole out of the spoils of their own order? Are the citizens of London to be drawn from their allegiance by feeding them at the expense of their fellow-subjects? Is a compulsory paper currency to be substituted in the place of the legal coin of this kingdom? Is what remains of the plundered stock of public revenue to be employed in the wild project of maintaining two armies to watch over and to fight with each other? If these are the ends and means of the Revolution Society, I admit they are well assorted; and France may furnish them for both with precedents in point.

I see that your example is held out to shame us. I know that we are supposed a dull, sluggish race, rendered passive by finding our situation tolerable, and prevented by a mediocrity of freedom from ever attaining to its full perfection. Your leaders in France began by affecting to admire, almost to adore, the British constitution; but as they advanced, they came to look upon it with a sovereign contempt. The friends of your National Assembly amongst us have full as mean an opinion of what was formerly thought the glory of their country. The Revolution Society has discovered that the English nation is not free. They are convinced that the inequality in our representation is a "defect in our constitution *so gross and palpable,* as to make it excellent chiefly in *form* and *theory.*"[32] That a representation in the legislature of a kingdom is not only the basis of all constitutional liberty in it, but of "*all legitimate government;* that without it a *government* is nothing but an *usurpation*";—that "when the representation is *partial,* the kingdom possesses liberty only *partially;* and if extremely partial, it gives only a *semblance;* and if not only extremely partial, but corruptly chosen, it becomes a *nuisance.*" Dr. Price considers this inadequacy of representation as our *fundamental grievance;* and though, as to the corruption of this semblance of representation, he hopes it is not yet arrived to its full perfection of depravity, he fears that "nothing will be done towards gaining

for us this *essential blessing,* until some *great abuse of power* again provokes our resentment, or some *great calamity* again alarms our fears, or perhaps till the acquisition of a *pure and equal representation by other countries,* whilst we are *mocked* with the *shadow,* kindles our shame." To this he subjoins a note in these words: "A representation chosen chiefly by the treasury, and a *few* thousands of the *dregs* of the people, who are generally paid for their votes."

You will smile here at the consistency of those democratists, who, when they are not on their guard, treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt, whilst, at the same time, they pretend to make them the depositories of all power. It would require a long discourse to point out to you the many fallacies that lurk in the generality and equivocal nature of the terms "inadequate representation."

32. * Discourse on the Love of our Country, 3d ed., p. 39.

I shall only say here, in justice to that old-fashioned constitution, under which we have long prospered, that our representation has been found perfectly adequate to all the purposes for which a representation of the people can be desired or devised. I defy the enemies of our constitution to show the contrary. To detail the particulars in which it is found so well to promote its ends, would demand a treatise on our practical constitution. I state here the doctrine of the Revolutionists, only that you and others may see what an opinion these gentlemen entertain of the constitution of their country, and why they seem to think that some great abuse of power, or some great calamity, as giving a chance for the blessing of a constitution according to their ideas, would be much palliated to their feelings; you see *why they* are so much enamoured of your fair and equal representation, which being once obtained, the same effects might follow. You see they consider our House of Commons as only "a semblance," "a form," "a theory," "a shadow," "a mockery," perhaps "a nuisance."

These gentlemen value themselves on being systematic; and not without reason. They must therefore look on this gross and palpable defect of representation, this fundamental grievance, (so they call it,) as a thing not only vicious in itself, but as rendering our whole government absolutely *illegitimate,* and not at all better than a downright *usurpation.* Another revolution, to get rid of this illegitimate and usurped government, would of

course be perfectly justifiable, if not absolutely necessary. Indeed their principle, if you observe it with any attention, goes much further than to an alteration in the election of the House of Commons; for, if popular representation, or choice, is necessary to the *legitimacy* of all government, the House of Lords is, at one stroke, bastardized and corrupted in blood. That House is no representative of the people at all, even in "semblance or in form." The case of the crown is altogether as bad. In vain the crown may endeavour to screen itself against these gentlemen by the authority of the establishment made on the Revolution. The Revolution which is resorted to for a title, on their system, wants a title itself. The Revolution is built, according to their theory, upon a basis not more solid than our present formalities, as it was made by a House of Lords, not representing any one but themselves; and by a House of Commons exactly such as the present, that is, as they term it, by a mere "shadow and mockery" of representation.

Something they must destroy, or they seem to themselves to exist for no purpose. One set is for destroying the civil power through the ecclesiastical; another, for demolishing the ecclesiastic through the civil. They are aware that the worst consequences might happen to the public in accomplishing this double ruin of church and state; but they are so heated with their theories, that they give more than hints, that this ruin, with all the mischiefs that must lead to it and attend it, and which to themselves appear quite certain, would not be unacceptable to them, or very remote from their wishes. A man amongst them of great authority, and certainly of great talents, speaking of a supposed alliance between church and state, says, "perhaps *we must wait for the fall of the civil powers* before this most unnatural alliance be broken. Calamitous no doubt will that time be. But what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation, if it be attended with so desirable an effect?"[33] You see with what a steady eye these gentlemen are prepared to view the greatest calamities which can befall their country.

It is no wonder therefore, that with these ideas of everything in their constitution and government at home, either in church or state, as illegitimate and usurped, or at best as a vain mockery, they look abroad with an eager and passionate enthusiasm. Whilst they are possessed by these notions, it is vain to talk to them of the practice of their ancestors, the fundamental laws of their country, the fixed form of a constitution, whose merits are confirmed by the solid test of long experience, and an increasing

public strength and national prosperity. They despise experience as the wisdom of unlettered men; and as for the rest, they have wrought underground a mine that will blow up, at one grand explosion, all examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters, and acts of parliament. They have "the rights of men." Against these there can be no prescription; against these no agreement is binding: these admit no temperament, and no compromise: anything withheld from their full demand is so much of fraud and injustice. Against these their rights of men let no government look for security in the length of its continuance, or in the justice and lenity of its administration. The objections of these speculatists, if its forms do not quadrate with their theories, are as valid against such an old and beneficent government, as against the most violent tyranny, or the greenest usurpation. They are always at issue with governments, not on a question of abuse, but a question of competency, and a question of title. I have nothing to say to the clumsy subtilty of their political metaphysics. Let them be their amusement in the schools.—"Illa *se jactat in aula—Æolus, et clauso ventorum carcere regnet.*"[34]—But let them not break prison to burst like a *Levanter,* to sweep the earth with their hurricane, and to break up the fountains of the great deep to overwhelm us.

33. Joseph Priestley, *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (Birmingham, 1782), 2: 484.

34. "In that hall let Aeolus lord it and rule within the barred prison of the winds." Virgil, *Aeneid,* 1, 140–41.

Far am I from denying in theory, full as far is my heart from withholding in practice, (if I were of power to give or to withhold,) the *real* rights of men. In denying their false claims of right, I do not mean to injure those which are real, and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy. If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right. It is an institution of beneficence; and law itself is only beneficence acting by a rule. Men have a right to live by that rule; they have a right to do justice, as between their fellows, whether their fellows are in public function or in ordinary occupation. They have a right to the fruits of their industry; and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents; to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring; to instruction in life, and to consolation in death. Whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do

for himself; and he has a right to a fair portion of all which society, with all its combinations of skill and force, can do in his favour. In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership, has as good a right to it, as he that has five hundred pounds has to his larger proportion. But he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock; and as to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be amongst the direct original rights of man in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention.

If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law. That convention must limit and modify all the descriptions of constitution which are formed under it. Every sort of legislative, judicial, or executory power are its creatures. They can have no being in any other state of things; and how can any man claim under the conventions of civil society, rights which do not so much as suppose its existence? rights which are absolutely repugnant to it? One of the first motives to civil society, and which becomes one of its fundamental rules, is, *that no man should be judge in his own cause.* By this each person has at once divested himself of the first fundamental right of uncovenanted man, that is, to judge for himself, and to assert his own cause. He abdicates all right to be his own governor. He inclusively, in a great measure, abandons the right of self-defence, the first law of nature. Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up his right of determining what it is in points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it.

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it; and exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection: but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything they want everything. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants.* Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom. Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into

subjection. This can only be done *by a power out of themselves;* and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle.

The moment you abate anything from the full rights of men, each to govern himself, and suffer any artificial, positive limitation upon those rights, from that moment the whole organization of government becomes a consideration of convenience. This it is which makes the constitution of a state, and the due distribution of its powers, a matter of the most delicate and complicated skill. It requires a deep knowledge of human nature and human necessities, and of the things which facilitate or obstruct the various ends, which are to be pursued by the mechanism of civil institutions. The state is to have recruits to its strength, and remedies to its distempers. What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right to food or medicine? The question is upon the method of procuring and administering them. In that deliberation I shall always advise to call in the aid of the farmer and the physician, rather than the professor of metaphysics.

The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *à priori.* Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science; because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate; but that which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation; and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. The reverse also happens: and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions. In states there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a very great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend. The science of government being therefore so practical in itself, and intended for such practical purposes, a matter which requires experience, and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be, it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice, which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society,

or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes.

These metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections, that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction. The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity: and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs. When I hear the simplicity of contrivance aimed at and boasted of in any new political constitutions, I am at no loss to decide that the artificers are grossly ignorant of their trade, or totally negligent of their duty. The simple governments are fundamentally defective, to say no worse of them. If you were to contemplate society in but one point of view, all these simple modes of polity are infinitely captivating. In effect each would answer its single end much more perfectly than the more complex is able to attain all its complex purposes. But it is better that the whole should be imperfectly and anomalously answered, than that, while some parts are provided for with great exactness, others might be totally neglected, or perhaps materially injured, by the over-care of a favourite member.

The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes: and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of *middle,* incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned. The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil. Political reason is a computing principle; adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing, morally and not metaphysically, or mathematically, true moral denominations.

By these theorists the right of the people is almost always sophistically confounded with their power. The body of the community, whenever it can come to act, can meet with no effectual resistance; but till power and right are the same, the whole body of them has no right inconsistent with virtue, and the first of all virtues, prudence. Men have no right to what is not reasonable, and to what is not for their benefit; for though a pleasant writer

said, *Liceat perire poetis,* when one of them, in cold blood, is said to have leaped into the flames of a volcanic revolution, *Ardentem frigidus Ætnam insiluit,* I consider such a frolic rather as an unjustifiable poetic licence, than as one of the franchises of Parnassus; and whether he were poet, or divine, or politician, that chose to exercise this kind of right, I think that more wise, because more charitable, thoughts would urge me rather to save the man, than to preserve his brazen slippers as the monuments of his folly.[35]

The kind of anniversary sermons to which a great part of what I write refers, if men are not shamed out of their present course, in commemorating the fact, will cheat many out of the principles, and deprive them of the benefits, of the revolution they commemorate. I confess to you, Sir, I never liked this continual talk of resistance, and revolution, or the practice of making the extreme medicine of the constitution its daily bread. It renders the habit of society dangerously valetudinary: it is taking periodical doses of mercury sublimate, and swallowing down repeated provocatives of cantharides to our love of liberty.

This distemper of remedy, grown habitual, relaxes and wears out, by a vulgar and prostituted use, the spring of that spirit which is to be exerted on great occasions. It was in the most patient period of Roman servitude that themes of tyrannicide made the ordinary exercise of boys at school—*cum perimit sævos classis numerosa tyrannos.*[36] In the ordinary state of things, it produces in a country like ours the worst effects, even on the cause of that liberty which it abuses with the dissoluteness of an extravagant speculation. Almost all the high-bred republicans of my time have, after a short space, become the most decided, thorough-paced courtiers; they soon left the business of a tedious, moderate, but practical resistance, to those of us whom, in the pride and intoxication of their theories, they have slighted as not much better than Tories. Hypocrisy, of course, delights in the most sublime speculations; for, never intending to go beyond speculation, it costs nothing to have it magnificent.

35. “Let bards be licens’d, then, themselves to kill,” like Empedocles who “Plung’d in cold blood in Aetna’s firely pit.” Horace, *Ars poetica,* 465–466, in *Poetical Translation,* 4: 325.

36. “What iron nerve must be needed, While your class, by the score, knocks off tyrannical monarchs.” Juvenal, *Satires,* VII, 151, in *Satires of Juvenal,* 97.

But even in cases where rather levity than fraud was to be suspected in these ranting speculations, the issue has been much the same. These professors, finding their extreme principles not applicable to cases which call only for a qualified, or, as I may say, civil and legal resistance, in such cases employ no resistance at all. It is with them a war or a revolution, or it is nothing. Finding their schemes of politics not adapted to the state of the world in which they live, they often come to think lightly of all public principle; and are ready, on their part, to abandon for a very trivial interest what they find of very trivial value. Some indeed are of more steady and persevering natures; but these are eager politicians out of parliament, who have little to tempt them to abandon their favourite projects. They have some change in the church or state, or both, constantly in their view. When that is the case, they are always bad citizens, and perfectly unsure connexions. For, considering their speculative designs as of infinite value, and the actual arrangement of the state as of no estimation, they are at best indifferent about it. They see no merit in the good, and no fault in the vicious, management of public affairs; they rather rejoice in the latter, as more propitious to revolution. They see no merit or demerit in any man, or any action, or any political principle, any further than as they may forward or retard their design of change: they therefore take up, one day, the most violent and stretched prerogative, and another time the wildest democratic ideas of freedom, and pass from the one to the other without any sort of regard to cause, to person, or to party.

In France you are now in the crisis of a revolution, and in the transit from one form of government to another—you cannot see that character of men exactly in the same situation in which we see it in this country. With us it is militant; with you it is triumphant; and you know how it can act when its power is commensurate to its will. I would not be supposed to confine those observations to any description of men, or to comprehend all men of any description within them—No! far from it. I am as incapable of that injustice, as I am of keeping terms with those who profess principles of extremities; and who, under the name of religion, teach little else than wild and dangerous politics. The worst of these politics of revolution is this: they temper and harden the breast, in order to prepare it for the desperate strokes which are sometimes used in extreme occasions. But as these occasions may never arrive, the mind receives a gratuitous taint; and the moral sentiments suffer not a little, when no political purpose is served by the

depravation. This sort of people are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgotten his nature. Without opening one new avenue to the understanding, they have succeeded in stopping up those that lead to the heart. They have perverted in themselves, and in those that attend to them, all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast.

This famous sermon of the Old Jewry breathes nothing but this spirit through all the political part. Plots, massacres, assassinations, seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years' security, and the still unanimating repose of public prosperity. The preacher found them all in the French Revolution. This inspires a juvenile warmth through his whole frame. His enthusiasm kindles as he advances; and when he arrives at his peroration it is in a full blaze. The viewing, from the Pisgah of his pulpit, the free, moral, happy, flourishing, and glorious state of France, as in a bird's-eye landscape of a promised land, he breaks out into the following rapture:

"What an eventful period is this! I am *thankful* that I have lived to it; I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*—I have lived to see a *diffusion* of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error.—I have lived to see *the rights of men* better understood than ever; and nations panting for liberty which seemed to have lost the idea of it.—I have lived to see *thirty millions of people,* indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice. *Their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.*"[37]

Before I proceed further, I have to remark, that Dr. Price seems rather to overvalue the great acquisitions of light which he has obtained and diffused in this age. The last century appears to me to have been quite as much enlightened. It had, though in a different place, a triumph as memorable as that of Dr. Price; and some of the great preachers of that period partook of it as eagerly as he has done in the triumph of France.

37. * Another of these reverend gentlemen, who was witness to some of the spectacles which Paris has lately exhibited, expresses himself thus:—"A king *dragged in submissive triumph by his conquering subjects,* is one of those appearances of grandeur which seldom rise in the prospect of human affairs, and which, during the remainder of my life, I shall think of with wonder and

gratification." These gentlemen agree marvelously in their feelings. [Richard Price later claimed that in the passage quoted by Burke he was actually referring to Louis XVI's visit to Paris following the fall of the Bastille in July 1789 rather than the monarch's being forced to return to Paris in October 1789.]

On the trial of the Rev. Hugh Peters for high treason, it was deposed, that when King Charles was brought to London for his trial, the Apostle of Liberty in that day conducted the *triumph.* "I saw," says the witness, "his Majesty in the coach with six horses, and Peters riding before the king, *triumphing.*" Dr. Price, when he talks as if he had made a discovery, only follows a precedent; for, after the commencement of the king's trial, this precursor, the same Dr. Peters, concluding a long prayer at the Royal Chapel at Whitehall, (he had very triumphantly chosen his place,) said, "I have prayed and preached these twenty years; and now I may say with old Simeon, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*"[38] Peters had not the fruits of his prayer; for he neither departed so soon as he wished, nor in peace. He became (what I heartily hope none of his followers may be in this country) himself a sacrifice to the triumph which he led as pontiff. They dealt at the Restoration, perhaps, too hardly with this poor good man. But we owe it to his memory and his sufferings, that he had as much illumination, and as much zeal, and had as effectually undermined all *the superstition and error* which might impede the great business he was engaged in, as any who follow and repeat after him, in this age, which would assume to itself an exclusive title to the knowledge of the rights of men, and all the glorious consequences of that knowledge.

After this sally of the preacher of the Old Jewry, which differs only in place and time, but agrees perfectly with the spirit and letter of the rapture of 1648, the Revolution Society, the fabricators of governments, the heroic band of *cashierers* of *monarchs,* electors of sovereigns, and leaders of kings in triumph, strutting with a proud consciousness of the diffusion of knowledge, of which every member had obtained so large a share in the donative, were in haste to make a generous diffusion of the knowledge they had thus gratuitously received. To make this bountiful communication, they adjourned from the church in the Old Jewry to the London Tavern; where the same Dr. Price, in whom the fumes of his oracular tripod were not entirely evaporated, moved and carried the resolution, or address of

congratulation, transmitted by Lord Stanhope to the National Assembly of France.

I find a preacher of the gospel profaning the beautiful and prophetic ejaculation, commonly called "*nunc dimittis,*" made on the first presentation of our Saviour in the temple, and applying it, with an inhuman and unnatural rapture, to the most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle that perhaps ever was exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind.[39]

38. * State Trials, vol. ii. pp. 360, 363.

39. *nunc dimittis:* the song of Simeon in the Gospel of St. Luke 2: 29–30, often cited as giving oneself permission to depart

This "*leading in triumph,*" a thing in its best form unmanly and irreligious, which fills our preacher with such unhallowed transports, must shock, I believe, the moral taste of every well-born mind. Several English were the stupified and indignant spectators of that triumph. It was (unless we have been strangely deceived) a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading into hovels hung round with scalps, their captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized, martial nation;—if a civilized nation, or any men who had a sense of generosity, were capable of a personal triumph over the fallen and afflicted.

This, my dear Sir, was not the triumph of France. I must believe that, as a nation, it overwhelmed you with shame and horror. I must believe that the National Assembly find themselves in a state of the greatest humiliation in not being able to punish the authors of this triumph, or the actors in it; and that they are in a situation in which any inquiry they may make upon the subject must be destitute even of the appearance of liberty or impartiality. The apology of that assembly is found in their situation; but when we approve what they *must* bear, it is in us the degenerate choice of a vitiated mind.

With a compelled appearance of deliberation, they vote under the dominion of a stern necessity. They sit in the heart, as it were, of a foreign republic: they have their residence in a city whose constitution has emanated neither from the charter of their king, nor from their legislative power. There they are surrounded by an army not raised either by the

authority of their crown, or by their command; and which, if they should order to dissolve itself, would instantly dissolve them. There they sit, after a gang of assassins had driven away some hundreds of the members; whilst those who held the same moderate principles, with more patience or better hope, continued every day exposed to outrageous insults and murderous threats. There a majority, sometimes real, sometimes pretended, captive itself, compels a captive king to issue as royal edicts, at third hand, the polluted nonsense of their most licentious and giddy coffeehouses. It is notorious, that all their measures are decided before they are debated. It is beyond doubt, that under the terror of the bayonet, and the lamp-post, and the torch to their houses, they are obliged to adopt all the crude and desperate measures suggested by clubs composed of a monstrous medley of all conditions, tongues, and nations. Among these are found persons, in comparison of whom Catiline would be thought scrupulous, and Cethegus a man of sobriety and moderation. Nor is it in these clubs alone that the public measures are deformed into monsters. They undergo a previous distortion in academies, intended as so many seminaries for these clubs, which are set up in all the places of public resort. In these meetings of all sorts, every counsel, in proportion as it is daring, and violent, and perfidious, is taken for the mark of superior genius. Humanity and compassion are ridiculed as the fruits of superstition and ignorance. Tenderness to individuals is considered as treason to the public. Liberty is always to be estimated perfect as property is rendered insecure. Amidst assassination, massacre, and confiscation, perpetrated or meditated, they are forming plans for the good order of future society. Embracing in their arms the carcases of base criminals, and promoting their relations on the title of their offences, they drive hundreds of virtuous persons to the same end, by forcing them to subsist by beggary or by crime.

The assembly, their organ, acts before them the farce of deliberation with as little decency as liberty. They act like the comedians of a fair before a riotous audience; they act amidst the tumultuous cries of a mixed mob of ferocious men, and of women lost to shame, who, according to their insolent fancies, direct, control, applaud, explode them; and sometimes mix and take their seats amongst them; domineering over them with a strange mixture of servile petulance and proud, presumptuous authority. As they have inverted order in all things, the gallery is in the place of the house. This assembly, which overthrows kings and kingdoms, has not even the

physiognomy and aspect of a grave legislative body—*nec color imperii, nec frons ulla senatús*.[40] They have a power given to them, like that of the evil principle, to subvert and destroy; but none to construct, except such machines as may be fitted for further subversion and further destruction.

Who is it that admires, and from the heart is attached to, national representative assemblies, but must turn with horror and disgust from such a profane burlesque, and abominable perversion of that sacred institute? Lovers of monarchy, lovers of republics, must alike abhor it. The members of your assembly must themselves groan under the tyranny of which they have all the shame, none of the direction, and little of the profit. I am sure many of the members who compose even the majority of that body must feel as I do, notwithstanding the applauses of the Revolution Society. Miserable king! miserable assembly! How must that assembly be silently scandalized with those of their members, who could call a day which seemed to blot the sun out of heaven, "*un beau jour!*"[41]

40. "No tyrant need blush in future: there will be no pretence of military command, and the Senate will never again be sued as a screen." Lucan, *Pharsala,* IX, 206–7.

41. * 6th of October, 1789.

How must they be inwardly indignant at hearing others, who thought fit to declare to them, "that the vessel of the state would fly forward in her course towards regeneration with more speed than ever," from the stiff gale of treason and murder, which preceded our preacher's triumph! What must they have felt, whilst, with outward patience, and inward indignation, they heard of the slaughter of innocent gentlemen in their houses, that "the blood spilled was not the most pure!" What must they have felt, when they were besieged by complaints of disorders which shook their country to its foundations, at being compelled coolly to tell the complainants, that they were under the protection of the law, and that they would address the king (the captive king) to cause the laws to be enforced for their protection; when the enslaved ministers of that captive king had formally notified to them, that there were neither law, nor authority, nor power left to protect! What must they have felt at being obliged, as a felicitation on the present new year, to request their captive king to forget the stormy period of the last, on account of the great good which *he* was likely to produce to his people; to the complete attainment of which good they adjourned the

practical demonstrations of their loyalty, assuring him of their obedience, when he should no longer possess any authority to command!

This address was made with much good nature and affection, to be sure. But among the revolutions in France must be reckoned a considerable revolution in their ideas of politeness. In England we are said to learn manners at second-hand from your side of the water, and that we dress our behaviour in the frippery of France. If so, we are still in the old cut; and have not so far conformed to the new Parisian mode of good breeding, as to think it quite in the most refined strain of delicate compliment (whether in condolence or congratulation) to say, to the most humiliated creature that crawls upon the earth, that great public benefits are derived from the murder of his servants, the attempted assassination of himself and of his wife, and the mortification, disgrace, and degradation, that he has personally suffered. It is a topic of consolation which our ordinary of Newgate would be too humane to use to a criminal at the foot of the gallows. I should have thought that the hangman of Paris, now that he is liberalized by the vote of the National Assembly, and is allowed his rank and arms in the herald's college of the rights of men, would be too generous, too gallant a man, too full of the sense of his new dignity, to employ that cutting consolation to any of the persons whom the *leze nation* might bring under the administration of his *executive power.*[42]

42. *leze nation:* treason against the nation as defined by the National Assembly

A man is fallen indeed, when he is thus flattered. The anodyne draught of oblivion, thus drugged, is well calculated to preserve a galling wakefulness, and to feed the living ulcer of a corroding memory. Thus to administer the opiate potion of amnesty, powdered with all the ingredients of scorn and contempt, is to hold to his lips, instead of "the balm of hurt minds," the cup of human misery full to the brim, and to force him to drink it to the dregs.[43]

Yielding to reasons, at least as forcible as those which were so delicately urged in the compliment on the new year, the king of France will probably endeavour to forget these events and that compliment. But history, who keeps a durable record of all our acts, and exercises her awful censure over the proceedings of all sorts of sovereigns, will not forget either those events, or the era of this liberal refinement in the intercourse of mankind.

History will record, that on the morning of the 6th of October, 1789, the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite, and troubled, melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight—that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give—that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment.

This king, to say no more of him, and this queen, and their infant children, (who once would have been the pride and hope of a great and generous people,) were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcases. Thence they were conducted into the capital of their kingdom. Two had been selected from the unprovoked, unresisted, promiscuous slaughter, which was made of the gentlemen of birth and family who composed the king's body guard. These two gentlemen, with all the parade of an execution of justice, were cruelly and publicly dragged to the block, and beheaded in the great court of the palace. Their heads were stuck upon spears, and led the procession; whilst the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women.

43. *Macbeth,* Act II, Scene 22. Balm there indicates sleep.

After they had been made to taste, drop by drop, more than the bitterness of death, in the slow torture of a journey of twelve miles, protracted to six hours, they were, under a guard, composed of those very soldiers who had thus conducted them through this famous triumph, lodged in one of the old palaces of Paris, now converted into a bastille for kings.

Is this a triumph to be consecrated at altars? to be commemorated with grateful thanksgiving? to be offered to the divine humanity with fervent prayer and enthusiastic ejaculation?—These Theban and Thracian orgies, acted in France, and applauded only in the Old Jewry, I assure you, kindle prophetic enthusiasm in the minds but of very few people in this kingdom: although a saint and apostle, who may have revelations of his own, and who has so completely vanquished all the mean superstitions of the heart, may incline to think it pious and decorous to compare it with the entrance into the world of the Prince of Peace, proclaimed in a holy temple by a venerable sage, and not long before not worse announced by the voice of angels to the quiet innocence of shepherds.

At first I was at a loss to account for this fit of unguarded transport. I knew, indeed, that the sufferings of monarchs make a delicious repast to some sort of palates. There were reflections which might serve to keep this appetite within some bounds of temperance. But when I took one circumstance into my consideration, I was obliged to confess, that much allowance ought to be made for the society, and that the temptation was too strong for common discretion; I mean, the circumstance of the Io Pæan of the triumph, the animating cry which called "for *all* the BISHOPS to be hanged on the lamp-posts," might well have brought forth a burst of enthusiasm on the foreseen consequences of this happy day.[44] I allow to so much enthusiasm some little deviation from prudence. I allow this prophet to break forth into hymns of joy and thanksgiving on an event which appears like the precursor of the Millenium, and the projected fifth monarchy, in the destruction of all church establishments. There was, however, (as in all human affairs there is,) in the midst of this joy, something to exercise the patience of these worthy gentlemen, and to try the long-suffering of their faith. The actual murder of the king and queen, and their child, was wanting to the other auspicious circumstances of this "*beautiful day.*" The actual murder of the bishops, though called for by so many holy ejaculations, was also wanting. A group of regicide and sacrilegious slaughter, was indeed boldly sketched, but it was only sketched.

44. * "Tous les Evêques à la lanterne."

It unhappily was left unfinished, in this great history-piece of the massacre of innocents. What hardy pencil of a great master, from the school of the rights of men, will finish it, is to be seen hereafter. The age has not yet the complete benefit of that diffusion of knowledge that has undermined superstition and error; and the king of France wants another object or two to consign to oblivion, in consideration of all the good which is to arise from his own sufferings, and the patriotic crimes of an enlightened age.[45]

45. * It is proper here to refer to a letter written upon this subject by an eye-witness. That eye-witness was one of the most honest, intelligent, and eloquent members of the National Assembly, one of the most active and zealous reformers of the state. He was obliged to secede from the assembly; and he afterwards became a voluntary exile, on account of the horrors of this pious triumph and the dispositions of men who, profiting of crimes, if not causing them, have taken the lead in public affairs.

Extract of M. de Lally Tollendal's Second Letter to a Friend

"Parlons du parti que j'ai pris; il est bien justifié dans ma conscience.—Ni cette ville coupable, ni cette assemblée plus coupable encore, ne meritoient que je me justifie; mais j'ai à coeur que vous, et les personnes qui pensent comme vous, ne me condamnent pas.—Ma santé, je vous jure, me rendoit mes fonctions impossibles; mais même en les mettant de côté il a été au-dessus de mes forces de supporter plus longtemp l'horreur que me causoit ce sang,—ces têtes—cette reine *presque égorgée,*—ce roi,—amené *esclave,*—entrant à Paris, au milieu de ses assassins, et précédé des têtes de ses malheureux gardes.—Ces perfides janissaires, ces assassins, ces femmes cannibales, ce cri de TOUS LES EVEQUES A LA LANTERNE, dans le moment où le roi entre sa capitale avec deux évêques de son conseil dans sa voiture. Un *coup de fusil,* que j'ai vu tirer dans un *des carosses de la reine*. M. Bailly appellant cela *un beau jour*. L'assemblée ayant déclaré froidement le matin, qu'il n'étoit pas de sa dignité d'aller toute entière environner le roi. M. Mirabeau disant impunément dans cette assemblée, que le vaisseau de l'état, loins d'être arrêté dans sa course, s'élanceroit avec plus de rapidité que jamais vers sa régénération. M. Barnave, riant avec lui, quand des flots de sang coulaient autour de nous. Le vertueux Mounier* échappant par miracle à vingt assassins, qui avoient voulu faire de sa tête un trophée de plus: Voilà ce qui me fit jurer de ne plus mettre le pied *dans cette caverne d'Antropophages* [the National Assembly] où je n'avois plus de force d'élever la voix, où depuis six semaines je l'avois élevée en vain.

"Moi, Mounier, et tous les honnêtes gens, ont pensé que le dernier effort à faire pour le bien étoit [*sic*] d'en sortir. Aucune idée de crainte ne s'est approchée de moi. Je rougirois de m'en defendre. J'avois encore reçû sur la route de la part de ce peuple, moins coupable que ceux qui l'ont enivré de fureur, des acclamations, et des applaudissements, dont d'autres auroient été flattés, et qui m'ont fait frémir. C'est à l'indignation, c'est à l'horreur, c'est aux convulsions physiques, que le seul aspect du sang me fait éprouver que j'ai cédé. On brave une seule mort; on la brave plusieurs fois, quand elle peut être utile. Mais aucune puissance sous le Ciel, mais aucune opinion publique ou privée n'ont le droit de me condamner à souffrir inutilement mille supplices par minute, et à perir de désespoir, de rage, au milieu des *triomphes,* du crime que je n'ai pu arrêter. Ils me proscriront, ils confisqueront mes biens. Je labourerai la terre, et je ne les verrai plus.—Voilà ma justification. Vous pouvez la lire, la montrer, la laisser copier; tant pis pour ceux qui ne la comprendront pas; ce ne sera alors moi qui auroit eu tort de la leur donner."

Although this work of our new light and knowledge did not go to the length that in all probability it was intended it should be carried, yet I must think that such treatment of any human creatures must be shocking to any but those who are made for accomplishing revolutions. But I cannot stop here. Influenced by the inborn feelings of my nature, and not being illuminated by a single ray of this new-sprung modern light, I confess to you, Sir,

> [Let us speak of the part which I have taken; it is thoroughly justified in my conscience. Neither this guilty city, nor this even more culpable assembly deserves my self-justification; but it is near my heart that you and those who think like you should not condemn me. My health, I assure you, renders it impossible for me to do my duties; but even in setting them aside it has been beyond my strength to endure longer the horror that courses through my blood, the heads, this queen nearly murdered, this king, led away a slave, entering into Paris in the midst of his assassins and preceded by the heads of those sad guards. These traitorous janissaries, these assassins, these cannibalistic women, that cry of "All the Bishops to the lantern," at the moment when the king entered his capital with two bishops from his council in his carriage. A gunshot I saw went into one of the queen's carriages. M. Bailly called this "a grand day." In the morning the Assembly having declared coldly that it was beneath its dignity to adjourn in order to accompany the kin followed by M. Mirabeau saying with impunity that the vessel of state would not be stopped in its course, but would advance even more rapidly towards its regeneration, then M. Barnave, laughing with him, when rivers of blood ran around us, and the virtuous Mounier* escaping by miracle from twenty assassins who sought to make his head another triumph. Here is what has made me swear never again to set foot into that cave of maneaters, where I no longer have the power to raise my voice, or rather for six weeks had raised it in vain.
>
> Mounier, all honest men, and myself must exercise every resource to leave it. No idea of fear has overcome me. I blush to defend myself on that matter. I have received on the road from that part of the people, less culpable than those drunk with anger, applause and acclamations by which others would be flattered, but which has made me quake. It is to the indignation, the horror, the physical convulsions suffered at the sight of blood, that I have given up. One chances death; one chances it many times to be useful. But no power under heaven, no public or private opinion has the right to condemn me to suffer a thousand tortures each minute, to perish of despair and rage, midst the triumphs of the crime that I have not been able to prevent. They will proscribe me; they will confiscate my goods. I shall till the soil and see them no more. That is my justification. You can read it, display it, and let it be copied. So much the worse for those who do not understand. It is not my fault for having given it to them. (Frank M. Turner, trans.)]

that the exalted rank of the persons suffering, and particularly the sex, the beauty, and the amiable qualities of the descendant of so many kings and emperors, with the tender age of royal infants, insensible only through infancy and innocence of the cruel outrages to which their parents were exposed, instead of being a subject of exultation, adds not a little to my sensibility on that most melancholy occasion.

I hear that the august person, who was the principal object of our preacher's triumph, though he supported hmself, felt much on that shameful occasion. As a man, it became him to feel for his wife and his children, and the faithful guards of his person, that were massacred in cold blood about him; as a prince, it became him to feel for the strange and frightful transformation of his civilized subjects, and to be more grieved for them than solicitous for himself. It derogates little from his fortitude, while it adds infinitely to the honour of his humanity. I am very sorry to say it, very sorry indeed, that such personages are in a situation in which it is not becoming in us to praise the virtues of the great.

I hear, and I rejoice to hear, that the great lady, the other object of the triumph, has borne that day, (one is interested that beings made for suffering should suffer well,) and that she bears all the succeeding days, that she bears the imprisonment of her husband, and her own captivity, and the exile of her friends, and the insulting adulation of addresses, and the whole weight of her accumulated wrongs, with a serene patience, in a manner suited to her rank and race, and becoming the offspring of a sovereign distinguished for her piety and her courage: that, like her, she has lofty sentiments; that she feels with the dignity of a Roman matron; that in the last extremity she will save herself from the last disgrace; and that, if she must fall, she will fall by no ignoble hand.

This military man had not so good nerves as the peaceable gentleman of the Old Jewry.—See Mons. Mounier's narrative of these transactions; a man also of honour, and virtue, and talents, and therefore a fugitive.

* N.B. Mr. Mounier was then speaker of the National Assembly. He has since been obliged to live in exile, though one of the firmest assertors of liberty.

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemd to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in,—glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendour, and joy. Oh! what a revolution! and what a heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should

have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.

This mixed system of opinion and sentiment had its origin in the ancient chivalry; and the principle, though varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs, subsisted and influenced through a long succession of generations, even to the time we live in. If it should ever be totally extinguished, the loss I fear will be great. It is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world. It was this, which, without confounding ranks, had produced a noble equality, and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a dominating vanquisher of laws to be subdued by manners.

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the

understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly. Regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father, are only common homicide; and if the people are by any chance, or in any way, gainers by it a sort of homicide much the most pardonable, and into which we ought not to make too severe a scrutiny.

On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and which is as void of solid wisdom as it is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows. Nothing is left which engages the affections on the part of the commonwealth. On the principles of this mechanic philosophy, our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons; so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment. But that sort of reason which banishes the affections is incapable of filling their place. These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law. The precept given by a wise man, as well as a great critic, for the construction of poems, is equally true as to states:—*Non satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunto*.[46] There ought to be a system of manners in every nation, which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.

But power, of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support. The usurpation which, in order to subvert ancient institutions, has destroyed ancient principles, will hold power by arts similar to those by which it has acquired it. When the old feudal and chivalrous spirit of *fealty,* which, by freeing kings from fear, freed both kings and subjects from the precautions of tyranny, shall be extinct in the minds of men, plots and

assassinations will be anticipated by preventive murder and preventive confiscation, and that long roll of grim and bloody maxims, which form the political code of all power, not standing on its own honour, and the honour of those who are to obey it. Kings will be tyrants from policy, when subjects are rebels from principle.

When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer. Europe, undoubtedly, taken in a mass, was in a flourishing condition the day on which your revolution was completed. How much of that prosperous state was owing to the spirit of our old manners and opinions is not easy to say; but as such causes cannot be indifferent in their operation, we must presume, that, on the whole, their operation was beneficial.

We are but too apt to consider things in the state in which we find them, without sufficiently adverting to the causes by which they have been produced, and possibly may be upheld. Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, the other by patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes, than formed.

46. ’Tis not enough, ye writers, that ye charm
With ease and elegance; a play should warm
With soft concernment.

Horace, *Ars poetica,* 99, in *Poetical Translation,* 4: 273.

Learning paid back what it received to nobility and to priesthood; and paid it with usury, by enlarging their ideas, and by furnishing their minds. Happy if they had all continued to know their indissoluble union, and their proper place! Happy if learning, not debauched by ambition, had been satisfied to continue the instructor, and not aspired to be the master! Along with its natural protectors, and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude.[47]

If, as I suspect, modern letters owe more than they are always willing to own to ancient manners, so do other interests which we value full as much as they are worth. Even commerce, and trade, and manufacture, the gods of our economic politicians, are themselves perhaps but creatures; are themselves but effects, which, as first causes, we choose to worship. They certainly grew under the same shade in which learning flourished. They too may decay with their natural protecting principles. With you, for the present at least, they all threaten to disappear together. Where trade and manufactures are wanting to a people, and the spirit of nobility and religion remains, sentiment supplies, and not always ill supplies, their place; but if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles, what sort of a thing must be a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and, at the same time, poor and sordid, barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter?

I wish you may not be going fast, and by the shortest cut, to that horrible and disgustful situation. Already there appears a poverty of conception, a coarseness and vulgarity, in all the proceedings of the Assembly and of all their instructors. Their liberty is not liberal. Their science is presumptuous ignorance. Their humanity is savage and brutal.

It is not clear, whether in England we learned those grand and decorous principles and manners, of which considerable traces yet remain, from you, or whether you took them from us. But to you, I think, we trace them best. You seem to me to be—*gentis incunabula nostræ.*[48] France has always more or less influenced manners in England; and when your fountain is choked up and polluted, the stream will not run long, or not run clear, with us, or perhaps with any nation. This gives all Europe, in my opinion, but too close and connected a concern in what is done in France.

47. * See the fate of Bailly and Condorcet, supposed to be here particularly alluded to. Compare the circumstances of the trial and execution of the former with this prediction.

48. “The cradle of our race.” Virgil, *Aeneid,* III: 105.

Excuse me, therefore, if I have dwelt too long on the atrocious spectacle of the 6th of October, 1789, or have given too much scope to the reflections which have arisen in my mind on occasion of the most important of all revolutions, which may be dated from that day, I mean a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions. As things now stand, with

everything respectable destroyed without us, and an attempt to destroy within us every principle of respect, one is almost forced to apologize for harbouring the common feelings of men.

Why do I feel so differently from the Reverend Dr. Price, and those of his lay flock who will choose to adopt the sentiments of his discourse?—For this plain reason—because it is *natural* I should; because we are so made, as to be affected at such spectacles with melancholy sentiments upon the unstable condition of mortal prosperity, and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness; because in those natural feelings we learn great lessons; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason; because when kings are hurled from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama, and become the objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good, we behold such disasters in the moral, as we should behold a miracle in the physical, order of things. We are alarmed into reflection; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity; our weak, unthinking pride is humbled under the dispensations of a mysterious wisdom. Some tears might be drawn from me, if such a spectacle were exhibited on the stage. I should be truly ashamed of finding in myself that superficial, theatric sense of painted distress, whilst I could exult over it in real life. With such a perverted mind, I could never venture to show my face at a tragedy. People would think the tears that Garrick formerly, or that Siddons long since, have extorted from me, were the tears of hypocrisy; I should know them to be the tears of folly.

Indeed the theatre is a better school of moral sentiments than churches, where the feelings of humanity are thus outraged. Poets who have to deal with an audience not yet graduated in the school of the rights of men, and who must apply themselves to the moral constitution of the heart, would not dare to produce such a triumph as a matter of exultation. There, where men follow their natural impulses, they would not bear the odious maxims of a Machiavelian policy, whether applied to the attainment of monarchical or democratic tyranny. They would reject them on the modern, as they once did on the ancient stage, where they could not bear even the hypothetical proposition of such wickedness in the mouth of a personated tyrant, though suitable to the character he sustained. No theatric audience in Athens would bear what has been borne, in the midst of the real tragedy of this triumphal day; a principal actor weighing, as it were in scales hung in a shop of horrors,—so much actual crime against so much contingent advantage,—

and after putting in and out weights, declaring that the balance was on the side of the advantages. They would not bear to see the crimes of new democracy posted as in a ledger against the crimes of old despotism, and the book-keepers of politics finding democracy still in debt, but by no means unable or unwilling to pay the balance. In the theatre, the first intuitive glance, without any elaborate process of reasoning, will show, that this method of political computation would justify every extent of crime. They would see, that on these principles, even where the very worst acts were not perpetrated, it was owing rather to the fortune of the conspirators, than to their parsimony in the expenditure of treachery and blood. They would soon see, that criminal means once tolerated are soon preferred. They present a shorter cut to the object than through the highway of the moral virtues. Justifying perfidy and murder for public benefit, public benefit would soon become the pretext, and perfidy and murder the end; until rapacity, malice, revenge, and fear more dreadful than revenge, could satiate their insatiable appetites. Such must be the consequences of losing, in the splendour of these triumphs of the rights of men, all natural sense of wrong and right.

But the reverend pastor exults in this “leading in triumph,” because truly Louis the Sixteenth was “an arbitrary monarch;” that is, in other words, neither more nor less than because he was Louis the Sixteenth, and because he had the misfortune to be born king of France, with the prerogatives of which, a long line of ancestors, and a long acquiescence of the people, without any act of his, had put him in possession. A misfortune it has indeed turned out to him, that he was born king of France. But misfortune is not crime, nor is indiscretion always the greatest guilt. I shall never think that a prince, the acts of whose whole reign was a series of concessions to his subjects, who was willing to relax his authority, to remit his prerogatives, to call his people to a share of freedom, not known, perhaps not desired, by their ancestors; such a prince, though he should be subjected to the common frailties attached to men and to princes, though he should have once thought it necessary to provide force against the desperate designs manifestly carrying on against his person, and the remnants of his authority; though all this should be taken into consideration, I shall be led with great difficulty to think he deserves the cruel and insulting triumph of Paris, and Dr. Price. I tremble for the cause of liberty, from such an example to kings. I tremble for the cause of humanity, in the unpunished outrages of

the most wicked of mankind. But there are some people of that low and degenerate fashion of mind, that they look up with a sort of complacent awe and admiration to kings, who know to keep firm in their seat, to hold a strict hand over their subjects, to assert their prerogative, and, by the awakened vigilance of a severe despotism, to guard against the very first approaches of freedom. Against such as these they never elevate their voice. Deserters from principle, listed with fortune, they never see any good in suffering virtue, nor any crime in prosperous usurpation.

If it could have been made clear to me, that the king and queen of France (those I mean who were such before the triumph) were inexorable and cruel tyrants, that they had formed a deliberate scheme for massacring the National Assembly, (I think I have seen something like the latter insinuated in certain publications,) I should think their captivity just. If this be true, much more ought to have been done, but done, in my opinion, in another manner. The punishment of real tyrants is a noble and awful act of justice; and it has with truth been said to be consolatory to the human mind. But if I were to punish a wicked king, I should regard the dignity in avenging the crime. Justice is grave and decorous, and in its punishments rather seems to submit to a necessity, than to make a choice. Had Nero, or Agrippina, or Louis the Eleventh, or Charles the Ninth, been the subject; if Charles the Twelfth of Sweden, after the murder of Patkul, or his predecessor Christina, after the murder of Monaldeschi, had fallen into your hands, Sir, or into mine, I am sure our conduct would have been different.

If the French king, or king of the French, (or by whatever name he is known in the new vocabulary of your constitution,) has in his own person, and that of his queen, really deserved these unavowed, but unavenged, murderous attempts, and those frequent indignities more cruel than murder, such a person would ill deserve even that subordinate executory trust, which I understand is to be placed in him; nor is he fit to be called chief in a nation which he has outraged and oppressed. A worse choice for such an office in a new commonwealth, than that of a deposed tyrant, could not possibly be made. But to degrade and insult a man as the worst of criminals, and afterwards to trust him in your highest concerns, as a faithful, honest, and zealous servant, is not consistent with reasoning, nor prudent in policy, nor safe in practice. Those who could make such an appointment must be guilty of a more flagrant breach of trust than any they have yet committed against the people. As this is the only crime in which your leading

politicians could have acted inconsistently, I conclude that there is no sort of ground for these horrid insinuations. I think no better of all the other calumnies.

In England, we give no credit to them. We are generous enemies: we are faithful allies. We spurn from us with disgust and indignation the slanders of those who bring us their anecdotes with the attestation of the flower-deluce on their shoulder. We have Lord George Gordon fast in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselyte to Judaism, nor his having, in his zeal against catholic priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics, raised a mob (excuse the term, it is still in use here) which pulled down all our prisons, have preserved to him a liberty, of which he did not render himself worthy by a virtuous use of it. We have rebuilt Newgate, and tenanted the mansion. We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastille, for those who dare to libel the queens of France. In this spiritual retreat, let the noble libeller remain. Let him there mediate on his Talmud, until he learns a conduct more becoming his birth and parts, and not so disgraceful to the ancient religion to which he has become a proselyte; or until some persons from your side of the water, to please your new Hebrew brethren, shall ransom him. He may then be enabled to purchase, with the old hoards of the synagogue, and a very small poundage on the long compound interest of the thirty pieces of silver, (Dr. Price has shown us what miracles compound interest will perform in 1790 years[49]) the lands which are lately discovered to have been usurped by the Gallican church. Send us your Popish archbishop of Paris, and we will send you our Protestant Rabbin. We shall treat the person you send us in exchange like a gentleman and an honest man, as he is; but pray let him bring with him the fund of his hospitality, bounty, and charity; and, depend upon it, we shall never confiscate a shilling of that honourable and pious fund, nor think of enriching the treasury with the spoils of the poor-box.

To tell you the truth, my dear Sir, I think the honour of our nation to be somewhat concerned in the disclaimer of the proceedings of this society of the Old Jewry and the London Tavern. I have no man's proxy. I speak only for myself, when I disclaim, as I do with all possible earnestness, all communion with the actors in that triumph, or with the admirers of it. When I assert anything else, as concerning the people of England, I speak from observation, not from authority; but I speak from the experience I have had in a pretty extensive and mixed communication with the inhabitants of this

kingdom, of all descriptions and ranks, and after a course of attentive observation, began early in life, and continued for nearly forty years. I have often been astonished, considering that we are divided from you but by a slender dyke of about twenty-four miles, and that the mutual intercourse between the two countries has lately been very great, to find how little you seem to know of us. I suspect that this is owing to your forming a judgment of this nation from certain publications, which do, very erroneously, if they do at all, represent the opinions and dispositions generally prevalent in England.

49. Richard Price was among other things an economist who had written extensively about interest.

The vanity, restlessness, petulance, and spirit of intrigue, of several petty cabals, who attempt to hide their total want of consequence in bustle and noise, and puffing, and mutual quotation of each other, makes you imagine that our contemptuous neglect of their abilities is a mark of general acquiescence in their opinions. No such thing, I assure you. Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field; that, of course, they are many in number; or that, after all, they are other than the little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour.

I almost venture to affirm, that not one in a hundred amongst us participates in the "triumph" of the Revolution Society. If the king and queen of France, and their children, were to fall into our hands by the chance of war, in the most acrimonious of all hostilities, (I deprecate such an event, I deprecate such hostility,) they would be treated with another sort of triumphal entry into London. We formerly have had a king of France in that situation; you have read how he was treated by the victor in the field; and in what manner he was afterwards received in England. Four hundred years have gone over us; but I believe we are not materially changed since that period. Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not (as I conceive) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century; nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples

of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that *we* have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality; nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law on our pert loquacity. In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man. We preserve the whole of our feelings still native and entire, unsophisticated by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility.[50] Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be so affected; because all other feelings are false and spurious, and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals, to render us unfit for rational liberty; and by teaching us a servile, licentious, and abandoned insolence, to be our low sport for a few holidays, to make us perfectly fit for, and justly deserving of, slavery, through the whole course of our lives.

You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat

of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnnected acts.

50. * The English are, I conceive, misrepresented in a letter published in one of the papers, by a gentleman thought to be a dissenting minister.—When writing to Dr. Price of the spirit which prevails at Paris, he says: "The spirit of the people in this place has abolished all the proud *distinctions* which the *king* and *nobles* had usurped in their minds; whether they talk of *the king, the noble, or the priest,* their whole language is that of the most *enlightened and liberal amongst the English*." If this gentleman means to confine the terms *enlightened and liberal* to one set of men in England, it may be true. It is not generally so.

Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.

Your literary men, and your politicians, and so do the whole clan of the enlightened among us, essentially differ in these points. They have no respect for the wisdom of others; but they pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own. With them it is a sufficient motive to destroy an old scheme of things, because it is an old one. As to the new, they are in no sort of fear with regard to the duration of a building run up in haste; because duration is no object to those who think little or nothing has been done before their time, and who place all their hopes in discovery. They conceive, very systematically, that all things which give perpetuity are mischievous, and therefore they are at inexpiable war with all establishments. They think that government may vary like modes of dress, and with as little ill effect: that there needs no principle of attachment, except a sense of present conveniency, to any constitution of the state. They always speak as if they were of opinion that there is a singular species of compact between them and their magistrates, which binds the magistrate, but which has nothing reciprocal in it, but that the majesty of the people has a right to dissolve it without any reason, but its will. Their attachment to their country itself is only so far as it agrees with some of their fleeting projects; it begins and ends with that scheme of polity which falls in with their momentary opinion.

These doctrines, or rather sentiments, seem prevalent with your new statesmen. But they are wholly different from those on which we have

always acted in this country.

I hear it is sometimes given out in France, that what is doing among you is after the example of England. I beg leave to affirm, that scarcely anything done with you has originated from the practice or the prevalent opinions of this people, either in the act or in the spirit of the proceeding. Let me add, that we are as unwilling to learn these lessons from France, as we are sure that we never taught them to that nation. The cabals here, who take a sort of share in your transactions, as yet consist of but a handful of people. If unfortunately by their intrigues, their sermons, their publications, and by a confidence derived from an expected union with the counsels and forces of the French nation, they should draw considerable numbers into their faction, and in consequence should seriously attempt anything here in imitation of what has been done with you, the event, I dare venture to prophesy, will be, that, with some trouble to their country, they will soon accomplish their own destruction. This people refused to change their law in remote ages from respect to the infallibility of popes; and they will not now alter it from a pious implicit faith in the dogmatism of philosophers; though the former was armed with the anathema and crusade, and though the latter should act with the libel and the lamp-iron.

Formerly your affairs were your own concern only. We felt for them as men; but we kept aloof from them, because we were not citizens of France. But when we see the model held up to ourselves, we must feel as Englishmen, and feeling, we must provide as Englishmen. Your affairs, in spite of us, are made a part of our interest; so far at least as to keep at a distance your panacea, or your plague. If it be a panacea, we do not want it. We know the consequences of unnecessary physic. If it be a plague, it is such a plague that the precautions of the most severe quarantine ought to be established against it.

I hear on all hands that a cabal, calling itself philosophic, receives the glory of many of the late proceedings; and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them. I have heard of no party in England, literary or political, at any time, known by such a description. It is not with you composed of those men, is it? whom the vulgar, in their blunt, homely style, commonly call atheists and infidels? If it be, I admit that we too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb,

and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world. In as few years their few successors will go to the family vault of "all the Capulets." But whatever they were, or are, with us, they were and are wholly unconnected individuals. With us they kept the common nature of their kind, and were not gregarious. They never acted in corps, or were known as a faction in the state, nor presumed to influence in that name or character, or for the purposes of such a faction, on any of our public concerns. Whether they ought so to exist, and so be permitted to act, is another question. As such cabals have not existed in England, so neither has the spirit of them had any influence in establishing the original frame of our constitution, or in any one of the several reparations and improvements it has undergone. The whole has been done under the auspices, and is confirmed by the sanctions, of religion and piety. The whole has emanated from the simplicity of our national character, and from a sort of native plainness and directness of understanding, which for a long time characterized those men who have successively obtained authority amongst us. This disposition still remains; at least in the great body of the people.

We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort.[51] In England we are so convinced of this, that there is no rust of superstition, with which the accumulated absurdity of the human mind might have crusted it over in the course of ages, that ninety-nine in a hundred of the people of England would not prefer to impiety. We shall never be such fools as to call in an enemy to the substance of any system to remove its corruptions, to supply its defects, or to perfect its construction. If our religious tenets should ever want a further elucidation, we shall not call on atheism to explain them. We shall not light up our temple from that unhallowed fire. It will be illuminated with other lights. It will be perfumed with other incense, than the infectious stuff which is imported by the smugglers of adulterated metaphysics. If our ecclesiastical establishment should want a revision, it is not avarice or rapacity, public or private, that we shall employ for the audit, or receipt, or application of its consecrated revenue. Violently condemning neither the Greek nor the Armenian, nor, since heats are subsided, the Roman system of religion, we prefer the Protestant; not because we think it

has less of the Christian religion in it, but because, in our judgment, it has more. We are Protestants, not from indifference, but from zeal.

We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long.

51. * Sit igitur hoc ab initio persuasum civibus, dominos esse omnium rerum ac moderatores, deos; eaque, quae gerantur, eorum geri vi, ditione, ac numine; eosdemque optime de genere hominum mereri; et qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, qua mente, qua pietate colat religiones intueri; piorum et impiorum habere rationem. His enim rebus imbutae mentes haud sane abhorrebunt ab utili et a vera sententia. Cic. de Legibus, 2: 15–16.

["So the citizens should first of all be convinced of this, that the gods are lords and masters of everything; that what is done is done by their decision and authority; that they are, moreover, great benefactors of mankind and observe what kind of person every one is—his actions and misdemeanors, his attitude and devotion to religious duties—and take note of the pious and the impious. Minds imbued with these facts will surely not deviate from true and wholesome ideas." Cicero, *The Laws,* 2: 15–16, in Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws,* Niall Rudd, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127.]

But if, in the moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously boiling, we should uncover our nakedness, by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilization amongst us, and amongst many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take place of it.

For that reason, before we take from our establishment the natural, human means of estimation, and give it up to contempt, as you have done, and in doing it have incurred the penalties you well deserve to suffer, we desire that some other may be presented to us in the place of it. We shall then form our judgment.

On these ideas, instead of quarrelling with establishments, as some do, who have made a philosophy and a religion of their hostility to such institutions, we cleave closely to them. We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater. I shall show you presently how much of each of these we possess.

It has been the misfortune (not, as these gentlemen think it, the glory) of this age, that everything is to be discussed, as if the constitution of our country were to be always a subject rather of altercation, than enjoyment.

For this reason, as well as for the satisfaction of those among you (if any such you have among you) who may wish to profit of examples, I venture to trouble you with a few thoughts upon each of these establishments. I do not think they were unwise in ancient Rome, who, when they wished to new-model their laws, set commissioners to examine the best constituted republics within their reach.

First, I beg leave to speak of our church establishment, which is the first of our prejudices, not a prejudice destitute of reason, but involving in it profound and extensive wisdom. I speak of it first. It is first, and last, and midst in our minds. For, taking ground on that religious system, of which we are now in possession, we continue to act on the early received and uniformly continued sense of mankind. That sense not only, like a wise architect, hath built up the august fabric of states, but like a provident proprietor, to preserve the structure from profanation and ruin, as a sacred temple purged from all the impurities of fraud, and violence, and injustice, and tyranny, hath solemnly and for ever consecrated the commonwealth, and all that officiate in it. This consecration is made, that all who administer in the government of men, in which they stand in the person of God himself, should have high and worthy notions of their function and destination; that their hope should be full of immortality; that they should not look to the paltry pelf of the moment, nor to the temporary and transient praise of the vulgar, but to a solid, permanent existence, in the permanent part of their nature, and to a permanent fame and glory, in the example they leave as a rich inheritance to the world.

Such sublime principles ought to be infused into persons of exalted situations; and religious establishments provided, that may continually revive and enforce them. Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, every sort of politic institution, aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine, are not more than necessary, in order to build up that wonderful structure, Man; whose prerogative it is, to be in a great degree a creature of his own making; and who, when made as he ought to be made, is destined to hold no trivial place in the creation. But whenever man is put over men, as the better nature ought ever to preside, in that case more particularly, he should as nearly as possible be approximated to his perfection.

The consecration of the state, by a state religious establishment, is necessary also to operate with a wholesome awe upon free citizens;

because, in order to secure their freedom, they must enjoy some determinate portion of power. To them therefore a religion connected with the state, and with their duty towards it, becomes even more necessary than in such societies, where the people, by the terms of their subjection, are confined to private sentiments, and the management of their own family concerns. All persons possessing any portion of power ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust: and that they are to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great Master, Author, and Founder of society.

This principle ought even to be more strongly impressed upon the minds of those who compose the collective sovereignty, than upon those of single princes. Without instruments, these princes can do nothing. Whoever uses instruments, in finding helps, finds also impediments. Their power is therefore by no means complete; nor are they safe in extreme abuse. Such persons, however elevated by flattery, arrogance, and self-opinion, must be sensible, that, whether covered or not by positive law, in some way or other they are accountable even here for the abuse of their trust. If they are not cut off by a rebellion of their people, they may be strangled by the very janissaries kept for their security against all other rebellion. Thus we have seen the king of France sold by his soldiers for an increase of pay. But where popular authority is absolute and unrestrained, the people have an infinitely greater, because a far better founded confidence in their own power. They are themselves, in a great measure, their own instruments. They are nearer to their objects. Besides, they are less under responsibility to one of the greatest controlling powers on earth, the sense of fame and estimation. The share of infamy, that is likely to fall to the lot of each individual in public acts, is small indeed; the operation of opinion being in the inverse ratio to the number of those who abuse power. Their own approbation of their own acts has to them the appearance of a public judgment in their favour. A perfect democracy is therefore the most shameless thing in the world. As it is the most shameless, it is also the most fearless. No man apprehends in his person that he can be made subject to punishment. Certainly the people at large never ought: for as all punishments are for example towards the conservation of the people at large, the people at large can never become the subject of punishment by any human hand.[52] It is therefore of infinite importance that they should not be suffered to imagine that their will, any more than that of kings, is the

standard of right and wrong. They ought to be persuaded that they are full as little entitled, and far less qualified, with safety to themselves, to use any arbitrary power whatsoever; that therefore they are not, under a false show of liberty, but in truth, to exercise an unnatural, inverted domination, tyrannically to exact, from those who officiate in the state, not an entire devotion to their interest, which is their right, but an abject submission to their occasional will; extinguishing thereby, in all those who serve them, all moral principle, all sense of dignity, all use of judgment, and all consistency of character; whilst by the very same process they give themselves up a proper, a suitable, but a most contemptible prey to the servile ambition of popular sycophants, or courtly flatterers.

When the people have emptied themselves of all the lust of selfish will, which without religion it is utterly impossible they ever should, when they are conscious that they exercise, and exercise perhaps in a higher link of the order of delegation, the power, which to be legitimate must be according to that eternal, immutable law, in which will and reason are the same, they will be more careful how they place power in base and incapable hands. In their nomination to office, they will not appoint to the exercise of authority, as to a pitiful job, but as to a holy function; not according to their sordid, selfish interest, nor to their wanton caprice, nor to their arbitrary will; but they will confer that power (which any man may well tremble to give or to receive) on those only, in whom they may discern that predominant proportion of active virtue and wisdom, taken together and fitted to the charge, such, as in the great and inevitable mixed mass of human imperfections and infirmities, is to be found.

When they are habitually convinced that no evil can be acceptable, either in the act or the permission, to him whose essence is good, they will be better able to extirpate out of the minds of all magistrates, civil, ecclesiastical, or military, anything that bears the least resemblance to a proud and lawless domination.

52. * Quicquid multis peccatur inultem. [The sin of thousands always goes unpunished. Lucan, *Parsala,* 5: 260.]

But one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from

their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it among their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of an habitation—and teaching these successors as little to respect their contrivances, as they had themselves respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways, as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.

And first of all, the science of jurisprudence, the pride of the human intellect, which, with all its defects, redundancies, and errors, is the collected reason of ages, combining the principles of original justice with the infinite variety of human concerns, as a heap of old exploded errors, would be no longer studied. Personal self-sufficiency and arrogance (the certain attendants upon all those who have never experienced a wisdom greater than their own) would usurp the tribunal. Of course no certain laws, establishing invariable grounds of hope and fear, would keep the actions of men in a certain course, or direct them to a certain end. Nothing stable in the modes of holding property, or exercising function, could form a solid ground on which any parent could speculate in the education of his offspring, or in a choice for their future establishment in the world. No principles would be early worked into the habits. As soon as the most able instructor had completed his laborious course of institution, instead of sending forth his pupil, accomplished in a virtuous discipline, fitted to procure him attention and respect, in his place in society, he would find everything altered; and that he had turned out a poor creature to the contempt and derision of the world, ignorant of the true grounds of estimation. Who would insure a tender and delicate sense of honour to beat almost with the first pulses of the heart, when no man could know what would be the test of honour in a nation, continually varying the standard of its coin? No part of life would retain its acquisitions. Barbarism with regard to science and literature, unskilfulness with regard to arts and manufactures, would infallibly succeed to the want of a steady education and settled principle; and thus the commonwealth itself would, in a few generations,

crumble away, be disconnected into the dust and powder of individuality, and at length dispersed to all the winds of heaven.

To avoid therefore the evils of inconstancy and versatility, ten thousand times worse than those of obstinacy and the blindest prejudice, we have consecrated the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country, who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father's life.

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure—but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primæval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those, who by an obligation above them, and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law. The municipal corporations of that universal kingdom are not morally at liberty at their pleasure, and on their speculations of a contingent improvement, wholly to separate and tear asunder the bands of their subordinate community, and to dissolve it into an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles. It is the first and supreme necessity only, a necessity that is not chosen, but chooses, a

necessity paramount to deliberation, that admits no discussion, and demands no evidence, which alone can justify a resort to anarchy. This necessity is no exception to the rule; because this necessity itself is a part too of that moral and physical disposition of things, to which man must be obedient by consent or force: but if that which is only submission to necessity should be made the object of choice, the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth, and exiled, from this world of reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow.

These, my dear Sir, are, were, and, I think, long will be, the sentiments of not the least learned and reflecting part of this kingdom. They, who are included in this description, form their opinions on such grounds as such persons ought to form them. The less inquiring receive them from an authority, which those whom Providence dooms to live on trust need not be ashamed to rely on. These two sorts of men move in the same direction, though in a different place. They both move with the order of the universe. They all know or feel this great ancient truth: "Quod illi principi et præpotenti Deo qui omnem hunc mundum regit, nihil eorum quæ quidem fiant in terris acceptius quam concilia et cœtus hominum jure sociati quæ civitates appellantur."[53] They take this tenet of the head and heart, not from the great name which it immediately bears, nor from the greater from whence it is derived; but from that which alone can give true weight and sanction to any learned opinion, the common nature and common relation of men. Persuaded that all things ought to be done with reference, and referring all to the point of reference to which all should be directed, they think themselves bound, not only as individuals in the sanctuary of the heart, or as congregated in that personal capacity, to renew the memory of their high origin and cast; but also in their corporate character to perform their national homage to the institutor, and author, and protector of civil society; without which civil society man could not by any possibility arrive at the perfection of which his nature is capable, nor even make a remote and faint approach to it. They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection.—He willed therefore the state—He willed its connexion with the source and original archetype of all perfection.

53. “To that supreme god who rules the universe nothing (or at least nothing that happens on earth) is more welcome than those companies and communities of people linked together by justice that are called states.” Cicero, *De republica,* VI, 13 in Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws,* 88.

They who are convinced of this his will, which is the law of laws, and the sovereign of sovereigns, cannot think it reprehensible that this our corporate fealty and homage, that this our recognition of a signiory paramount, I had almost said this oblation of the state itself, as a worthy offering on the high altar of universal praise, should be performed as all public, solemn acts are performed, in buildings, in music, in decoration, in speech, in the dignity of persons, according to the customs of mankind, taught by their nature; this is, with modest splendour and unassuming state, with mild majesty and sober pomp. For those purposes they think some part of the wealth of the country is as usefully employed as it can be in fomenting the luxury of individuals. It is the public ornament. It is the public consolation. It nourishes the public hope. The poorest man finds his own importance and dignity in it, whilst the wealth and pride of individuals at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune sensible of his inferiority, and degrades and vilifies his condition. It is for the man in humble life, and to raise his nature, and to put him in mind of a state in which the privileges of opulence will cease, when he will be equal by nature, and may be more than equal by virtue, that this portion of the general wealth of his country is employed and sanctified.

I assure you I do not aim at singularity. I give you opinions which have been accepted amongst us, from very early times to this moment, with a continued and general approbation, and which indeed are so worked into my mind, that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation.

It is on some such principles that the majority of the people of England, far from thinking a religious national establishment unlawful, hardly think it lawful to be without one. In France you are wholly mistaken if you do not believe us above all other things attached to it, and beyond all other nations; and when this people has acted unwisely and unjustfiably in its favour, (as in some instances they have done most certainly,) in their very errors you will at least discover their zeal.

This principle runs through the whole system of their polity. They do not consider their church establishment as convenient, but as essential to their state; not as a thing heterogeneous and separable; something added for

accommodation; what they may either keep or lay aside, according to their temporary ideas of convenience. They consider it as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which, it holds an indissoluble union. Church and state are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other.

Our education is so formed as to confirm and fix this impression. Our education is in a manner wholly in the hands of ecclesiastics, and in all stages from infancy to manhood. Even when our youth, leaving schools and universities, enter that most important period of life which begins to link experience and study together, and when with that view they visit other countries, instead of old domestics whom we have seen as governors to principal men from other parts, three-fourths of those who go abroad with our young nobility and gentlemen are ecclesiastics; not as austere masters, nor as mere followers; but as friends and companions of a graver character, and not seldom persons as well born as themselves. With them, as relations, they most constantly keep up a close connexion through life. By this connexion we conceive that we attach our gentlemen to the church; and we liberalize the church by an intercourse with the leading characters of the country.

So tenacious are we of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution, that very little alteration has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth century: adhering in this particular, as in all things else, to our old settled maxim, never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favourable to morality and discipline; and we thought they were susceptible of amendment, without altering the ground. We thought that they were capable of receiving and meliorating, and above all of preserving, the accessions of science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the ground-work) we may put in our claim to as ample and as early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature, which have illuminated and adorned the modern world, as any other nation in Europe: we think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers.

It is from our attachment to a church establishment, that the English nation did not think it wise to intrust that great, fundamental interest of the whole to what they trust no part of their civil or military public service, that is, to the unsteady and precarious contribution of individuals. They go further. They certainly never have suffered, and never will suffer, the fixed estate of the church to be converted into a pension, to depend on the treasury, and to be delayed, withheld, or perhaps to be extinguished, by fiscal difficulties: which difficulties may sometimes be pretended for political purposes, and are in fact often brought on by the extravagance, negligence, and rapacity of politicians. The people of England think that they have constitutional motives, as well as religious, against any project of turning their independent clergy into ecclesiastical pensioners of state. They tremble for their liberty, from the influence of a clergy dependent on the crown; they tremble for the public tranquillity from the disorders of a factious clergy, if it were made to depend upon any other than the crown. They therefore made their church, like their king and their nobility, independent.

From the united considerations of religion and constitutional policy, from their opinion of a duty to make sure provision for the consolation of the feeble and the instruction of the ignorant, they have incorporated and identified the estate of the church with the mass of *private property,* of which the state is not the proprietor, either for use or dominion, but the guardian only and the regulator. They have ordained that the provision of this establishment might be as stable as the earth on which it stands, and should not fluctuate with the Euripus of funds and actions.

The men of England, the men, I mean, of light and leading in England, whose wisdom (if they have any) is open and direct, would be ashamed, as of a silly, deceitful trick, to profess any religion in name, which, by their proceedings, they appear to contemn. If by their conduct (the only language that rarely lies) they seemed to regard the great ruling principle of the moral and the natural world, as a mere invention to keep the vulgar in obedience, they apprehend that by such a conduct they would defeat the politic purpose they have in view. They would find it difficult to make others believe in a system to which they manifestly give no credit themselves. The Christian statesmen of this land would indeed first provide for the *multitude;* because it is the *multitude;* and is therefore, as such, the first object in the ecclesiastical institution, and in all institutions. They have been taught, that

the circumstances of the gospel's being preached to the poor, was one of the great tests of its true mission. They think, therefore, that those do not believe it, who do not take care it should be preached to the poor. But as they know that charity is not confined to any one description, but ought to apply itself to all men who have wants, they are not deprived of a due and anxious sensation of pity to the distresses of the miserable great. They are not repelled through a fastidious delicacy, at the stench of their arrogance and presumption, from a medicinal attention to their mental blotches and running sores. They are sensible, that religious instruction is of more consequence to them than to any others; from the greatness of the temptation to which they are exposed; from the important consequences that attend their faults; from the contagion of their ill example; from the necessity of bowing down the stubborn neck of their pride and ambition to the yoke of moderation and virtue; from a consideration of the fat stupidity and gross ignorance concerning what imports men most to know, which prevails at courts, and at the head of armies, and in senates, as much as at the loom and in the field.

The English people are satisfied, that to the great the consolations of religion are as necessary as its instructions. They too are among the unhappy. They feel personal pain, and domestic sorrow. In these they have no privilege, but are subject to pay their full contingent to the contributions levied on mortality. They want this sovereign balm under their gnawing cares and anxieties, which, being less conversant about the limited wants of animal life, range without limit, and are diversified by infinite combinations, in the wild and unbounded regions of imagination. Some charitable dole is wanting to these, our often very unhappy brethren, to fill the gloomy void that reigns in minds which have nothing on earth to hope or fear; something to relieve in the killing languor and over-laboured lassitude of those who have nothing to do; something to excite an appetite to existence in the palled satiety which attends on all pleasures which may be bought, where nature is not left to her own process, where even desire is anticipated, and therefore fruition defeated by meditated schemes and contrivances of delight; and no interval, no obstacle, is interposed between the wish and the accomplishment.

The people of England know how little influence the teachers of religion are likely to have with the wealthy and powerful of long standing, and how much less with the newly fortunate, if they appear in a manner no

way assorted to those with whom they must associate, and over whom they must even exercise, in some cases, something like an authority. What must they think of that body of teachers, if they see it in no part above the establishment of their domestic servants? If the poverty were voluntary, there might be some difference. Strong instances of self-denial operate powerfully on our minds; and a man who has no wants has obtained great freedom, and firmness, and even dignity. But as the mass of any description of men are but men, and their poverty cannot be voluntary, that disrespect, which attends upon all lay poverty, will not depart from the ecclesiastical. Our provident constitution has therefore taken care that those who are to instruct presumptuous ignorance, those who are to be censors over insolent vice, should neither incur their contempt, nor live upon their alms; nor will it tempt the rich to a neglect of the true medicine of their minds. For these reasons, whilst we provide first for the poor, and with a parental solicitude, we have not relegated religion (like something we were ashamed to show) to obscure municipalities, or rustic villages. No! we will have her to exalt her mitred front in courts and parliaments. We will have her mixed throughout the whole mass of life, and blended with all the classes of society. The people of England will show to the haughty potentates of the world, and to their talking sophisters, that a free, a generous, an informed nation honours the high magistrates of its church; that it will not suffer the insolence of wealth and titles, or any other species of proud pretension, to look down with scorn upon what they look up to with reverence; nor presume to trample on that acquired personal nobility, which they intend always to be, and which often is, the fruit, not the reward, (for what can be the reward?) of learning, piety, and virtue. They can see, without pain or grudging, an archbishop precede a duke. They can see a bishop of Durham, or a bishop of Winchester, in possession of ten thousand pounds a year; and cannot conceive why it is in worse hands than estates to the like amount in the hands of this earl, or that squire; although it may be true, that so many dogs and horses are not kept by the former, and fed with the victuals which ought to nourish the children of the people. It is true, the whole church revenue is not always employed, and to every shilling, in charity; nor perhaps ought it; but something is generally so employed. It is better to cherish virtue and humanity, by leaving much to free will, even with some loss to the object, than to attempt to make men mere machines and

instruments of a political benevolence. The world on the whole will gain by a liberty, without which virtue cannot exist.

When once the commonwealth has established the estates of the church as property, it can, consistently, hear nothing of the more or the less. To much and too little are treason against property. What evil can arise from the quantity in any hand, whilst the supreme authority has the full, sovereign superintendence over this, as over all property, to prevent every species of abuse; and, whenever it notably deviates, to give to it a direction agreeable to the purposes of its institution.

In England most of us conceive that it is envy and malignity towards those who are often the beginners of their own fortune, and not a love of the self-denial and mortification of the ancient church, that makes some look askance at the distinctions, and honours, and revenues, which, taken from no person, are set apart for virtue. The ears of the people of England are distinguishing. They hear these men speak broad. Their tongue betrays them. Their language is in the *patois* of fraud[54]; in the cant and gibberish of hypocrisy. The people of England must think so, when these praters affect to carry back the clergy to that primitive, evangelic poverty, which, in the spirit, ought always to exist in them, (and in us too, however we may like it,) but in the thing must be varied, when the relation of that body to the state is altered; when manners, when modes of life, when indeed the whole order of human affairs, has undergone a total revolution. We shall believe those reformers then to be honest enthusiasts, not, as now we think them, cheats and deceivers, when we see them throwing their own goods into common, and submitting their own persons to the austere discipline of the early church.

54. *patois:* local dialect

With these ideas rooted in their minds, the Commons of Great Britain, in the national emergencies, will never seek their resource from the confiscation of the estates of the church and poor. Sacrilege and proscription are not among the ways and means of our committee of supply. The Jews in Change Alley have not yet dared to hint their hopes of a mortgage on the revenues belonging to the see of Canterbury. I am not afraid that I shall be disavowed, when I assure you, that there is not *one* public man in this kingdom, whom you would wish to quote, no not one, of

any party or description, who does not reprobate the dishonest, perfidious, and cruel confiscation which the National Assembly has been compelled to make of that property, which it was their first duty to protect.

It is with the exultation of a little national pride I tell you, that those amongst us who have wished to pledge the societies of Paris in the cup of their abominations have been disappointed. The robbery of your church has proved a security to the possessions of ours. It has roused the people. They see with horror and alarm that enormous and shameless act of proscription. It has opened, and will more and more open, their eyes upon the selfish enlargement of mind, and the narrow liberality of sentiment, of insidious men, which, commencing in close hypocrisy and fraud, have ended in open violence and rapine. At home we behold similar beginnings. We are on our guard against similar conclusions.

I hope we shall never be so totally lost to all sense of the duties imposed upon us by the law of social union, as, upon any pretext of public service, to confiscate the goods of a single unoffending citizen. Who but a tyrant (a name expressive of everything which can vitiate and degrade human nature) could think of seizing on the property of men, unaccused, unheard, untried, by whole descriptions, by hundreds and thousands together? Who, that had not lost every trace of humanity, could think of casting down men of exalted rank and sacred function, some of them of an age to call at once for reverence and compassion, of casting them down from the highest situation in the commonwealth, wherein they were maintained by their own landed property, to a state of indigence, depression, and contempt?

The confiscators truly have made some allowance to their victims from the scraps and fragments of their own tables, from which they have been so harshly driven, and which have been so bountifully spread for a feast to the harpies of usury. But to drive men from independence to live on alms, is itself great cruelty. That which might be a tolerable condition to men in one state of life, and not habituated to other things, may, when all these circumstances are altered, be a dreadful revolution; and one to which a virtuous mind would feel pain in condemning any guilt, except that which would demand the life of the offender. But to many minds this punishment of *degradation* and *infamy* is worse than death. Undoubtedly it is an infinite aggravation of this cruel suffering, that the persons who were taught a double prejudice in favour of religion, by education, and by the place they held in the administration of its functions, are to receive the remnants of

their property as alms from the profane and impious hands of those who had plundered them of all the rest; to receive (if they are at all to receive) not from the charitable contributions of the faithful, but from the insolent tenderness of known and avowed atheism, the maintenance of religion, measured out to them on the standard of the contempt in which it is held; and for the purpose of rendering those who receive the allowance vile, and of no estimation, in the eyes of mankind.

But this act of seizure of property, it seems, is a judgment in law, and not a confiscation. They have, it seems, found out in the academies of the *Palais Royal,* and the *Jacobins,* that certain men had no right to the possessions which they held under law, usage, the decisions of courts, and the accumulated prescription of a thousand years. They say that ecclesiastics are fictitious persons, creatures of the state, whom at pleasure they may destroy, and of course limit and modify in every particular; that the goods they possess are not properly theirs, but belong to the state which created the fiction; and we are therefore not to trouble ourselves with what they may suffer in their natural feelings and natural persons, on account of what is done towards them in this their constructive character. Of what import is it under what names you injure men, and deprive them of the just emoluments of a profession, in which they were not only permitted but encouraged by the state to engage; and upon the supposed certainty of which emoluments they had formed the plan of their lives, contracted debts, and led multitudes to an entire dependence upon them?

You do not imagine, Sir, that I am going to compliment this miserable distinction of persons with any long discussion. The arguments of tyranny are as contemptible as its force is dreadful. Had not your confiscators, by their early crimes, obtained a power which secures indemnity to all the crimes of which they have since been guilty, or that they can commit, it is not the syllogism of the logician, but the lash of the executioner, that would have refuted a sophistry which becomes an accomplice of theft and murder. The sophistic tyrants of Paris are loud in their declamations against the departed regal tyrants, who in former ages have vexed the world. They are thus bold, because they are safe from the dungeons and iron cages of their old masters. Shall we be more tender of the tyrants of our own time, when we see them acting worse tragedies under our eyes? shall we not use the same liberty that they do, when we can use it with the same safety? when to

speak honest truth only requires a contempt of the opinions of those whose actions we abhor?

This outrage on all the rights of property was at first covered with what, on the system of their conduct, was the most astonishing of all pretexts—a regard to national faith. The enemies to property at first pretended a most tender, delicate, and scrupulous anxiety for keeping the king's engagements with the public creditor. These professors of the rights of men are so busy in teaching others, that they have not leisure to learn anything themselves; otherwise they would have known, that it is to the property of the citizen, and not to the demands of the creditor of the state, that the first and original faith of civil society is pledged. The claim of the citizen is prior in time, paramount in title, superior in equity. The fortunes of individuals, whether possessed by acquisition, or by descent, or in virtue of a participation in the goods of some community, were no part of the creditor's security, expressed or implied. They never so much as entered into his head when he made his bargain. He well knew that the public, whether represented by a monarch or by a senate, can pledge nothing but the public estate; and it can have no public estate, except in what it derives from a just and proportioned imposition upon the citizens at large. This was engaged, and nothing else could be engaged, to the public creditor. No man can mortgage his injustice as a pawn for his fidelity.

It is impossible to avoid some observation on the contradictions caused by the extreme rigour and the extreme laxity of this new public faith, which influenced in this transaction, and which influenced not according to the nature of the obligation, but to the description of the persons to whom it was engaged. No acts of the old government of the kings of France are held valid in the National Assembly, except his pecuniary engagements; acts of all others of the most ambiguous legality. The rest of the acts of that royal government are considered in so odious a light, that to have a claim under its authority is looked on as a sort of crime. A pension, given as a reward for service to the state, is surely as good a ground of property as any security for money advanced to the state. It is better; for money is paid, and well paid, to obtain that service. We have however seen multitudes of people under this description in France, who never had been deprived of their allowances by the most arbitrary ministers, in the most arbitrary times, by this assembly of the rights of men, robbed without mercy. They were told,

in answer to their claim to the bread earned with their blood, that their services had not been rendered to the country that now exists.

This laxity of public faith is not confined to those unfortunate persons. The Assembly, with perfect consistency it must be owned, is engaged in a respectable deliberation how far it is bound by the treaties made with other nations under the former government, and their committee is to report which of them they ought to ratify, and which not. By this means they have put the external fidelity of this virgin state on a par with its internal.

It is not easy to conceive upon what rational principle the royal government should not, of the two, rather have possessed the power of rewarding service, and making treaties, in virtue of its prerogative, than that of pledging to creditors the revenue of the state, actual and possible. The treasure of the nation, of all things, has been the least allowed to the prerogative of the king of France, or to the prerogative of any king in Europe. To mortgage the public revenue implies the sovereign dominion, in the fullest sense, over the public purse. It goes far beyond the trust even of a temporary and occasional taxation. The acts however of that dangerous power (the distinctive mark of a boundless despotism) have been alone held sacred. Whence arose this preference given by a democratic assembly to a body of property deriving its title from the most critical and obnoxious of all the exertions of monarchical authority? Reason can furnish nothing to reconcile inconsistency; nor can partial favour be accounted for upon equitable principles. But the contradiction and partiality which admit no justification, are not the less without an adequate cause; and that cause I do not think it difficult to discover.

By the vast debt of France a great monied interest has insensibly grown up, and with it a great power. By the ancient usages which prevailed in that kingdom, the general circulation of property, and in particular the mutual convertibility of land into money, and of money into land, had always been a matter of difficulty. Family settlements, rather more general and more strict than they are in England, the *jus retractus,* the great mass of landed property held by the crown, and, by a maxim of the French law, held unalienably, the vast estates of the ecclesiastic corporations,—all these had kept the landed and monied interests more separated in France, less miscible, and the owners of the two distinct species of property not so well disposed to each other as they are in this country.[55]

The monied property was long looked on with rather an evil eye by the people.

55. *jus retractus:* the right of a feudal lord to buy back land that had once been part of his fief

They saw it connected with their distresses, and aggravating them. It was no less envied by the old landed interests, partly for the same reasons that rendered it obnoxious to the people, but much more so as it eclipsed, by the splendour of an ostentatious luxury, the unendowed pedigrees and naked titles of several among the nobility. Even when the nobility, which represented the more permanent landed interest, united themselves by marriage (which sometimes was the case) with the other description, the wealth which saved the family from ruin, was supposed to contaminate and degrade it. Thus the enmities and heart-burnings of these parties were increased even by the usual means by which discord is made to cease and quarrels are turned into friendship. In the mean time, the pride of the wealthy men, not noble or newly noble, increased with its cause. They felt with resentment an inferiority, the grounds of which they did not acknowledge. There was no measure to do which they were not willing to lend themselves, in order to be revenged of the outrages of this rival pride, and to exalt their wealth to what they considered as its natural rank and estimation. They struck at the nobility through the crown and the church. They attacked them particularly on the side on which they thought them the most vulnerable, that is, the possessions of the church, which, through the patronage of the crown, generally devolved upon the nobility. The bishoprics, and the great commendatory abbeys, were, with few exceptions, held by that order.

In this state of real, though not always perceived, warfare between the noble ancient landed interest and the new monied interest, the greatest because the most applicable strength was in the hands of the latter. The monied interest is in its nature more ready for any adventure; and its possessors more disposed to new enterprises of any kind. Being of a recent acquisition, it falls in more naturally with any novelties. It is therefore the kind of wealth which will be resorted to by all who wish for change.

Along with the monied interest, a new description of men had grown up, with whom that interest soon formed a close and marked union; I mean the political men of letters. Men of letters, fond of distinguishing

themselves, are rarely averse to innovation. Since the decline of the life and greatness of Louis the Fourteenth, they were not so much cultivated either by him, or by the regent, or the successors to the crown; nor were they engaged to the court by favours and emoluments so systematically as during the splendid period of that ostentatious and not impolitic reign. What they lost in the old court protection, they endeavoured to make up by joining in a sort of incorporation of their own; to which the two academies of France, and afterwards the vast undertaking of the Encyclopædia, carried on by a society of these gentlemen, did not a little contribute.

The literary cabal had some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion. This object they pursued with a degree of zeal which hitherto had been discovered only in the propagators of some system of piety. They were possessed with a spirit of proselytism in the most fanatical degree; and from thence, by an easy progress, with the spirit of persecution according to their means.[56] What was not to be done towards their great end by any direct or immediate act, might be wrought by a longer process through the medium of opinion. To command the opinion, the first step is to establish a dominion over those who direct it. They contrived to possess themselves, with great method and perseverance, of all the avenues to literary fame. Many of them indeed stood high in the ranks of literature and science. The world had done them justice; and in favour of general talents forgave the evil tendency of their peculiar principles. This was true liberality; which they returned by endeavouring to confine the reputation of sense, learning, and taste to themselves or their followers. I will venture to say that this narrow, exclusive spirit has not been less prejudicial to literature and to taste, than to morals and true philosophy. These atheistical fathers have a bigotry of their own; and they have learnt to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk. But in some things they are men of the world. The resources of intrigue are called in to supply the defects of argument and wit. To this system of literary monopoly was joined an unremitting industry to blacken and discredit in every way, and by every means, all those who did not hold to their faction. To those who have observed the spirit of their conduct, it has long been clear that nothing was wanted but the power of carrying the intolerance of the tongue and of the pen into a persecution which would strike at property, liberty, and life.

The desultory and faint persecution carried on against them, more from compliance with form and decency, than with serious resentment, neither weakened their strength, nor relaxed their efforts. The issue of the whole was, that, what with opposition, and what with success, a violent and malignant zeal, of a kind hitherto unknown in the world, had taken an entire possession of their minds, and rendered their whole conversation, which otherwise would have been pleasing and instructive, perfectly disgusting. A spirit of cabal, intrigue, and proselytism, pervaded all their thoughts, words, and actions.

56. * This (down to the end of the first sentence in the next paragraph) and some other parts here and there, were inserted, on his reading the manuscript, by my lost Son.

And, as controversial zeal soon turns its thoughts on force, they began to insinuate themselves into a correspondence with foreign princes; in hopes, through their authority, which at first they flattered, they might bring about the changes they had in view. To them it was indifferent whether these changes were to be accomplished by the thunderbolt of despotism, or by the earthquake of popular commotion. The correspondence between this cabal and the late king of Prussia will throw no small light upon the spirit of all their proceedings.[57] For the same purpose for which they intrigued with princes, they cultivated, in a distinguished manner, the monied interest of France; and partly through the means furnished by those whose peculiar offices gave them the most extensive and certain means of communication, they carefully occupied all the avenues to opinion.

Writers, especially when they act in a body, and with one direction, have great influence on the public mind; the alliance, therefore, of these writers with the monied interest[58] had no small effect in removing the popular odium and envy which attended that species of wealth. These writers, like the propagators of all novelties, pretended to a great zeal for the poor, and the lower orders, whilst in their satires they rendered hateful, by every exaggeration, the faults of courts, of nobility, and of priesthood. They became a sort of demagogues. They served as a link to unite, in favour of one object, obnoxious wealth to restless and desperate poverty.

As these two kinds of men appear principal leaders in all the late transactions, their junction and politics will serve to account, not upon any principles of law or of policy, but as a *cause,* for the general fury with

which all the landed property of ecclesiastical corporations has been attacked; and the great care which, contrary to their pretended principles, has been taken, of a monied interest originating from the authority of the crown. All the envy against wealth and power was artificially directed against other descriptions of riches. On what other principle than that which I have stated can we account for an appearance so extraordinary and unnatural as that of the ecclesiastical possessions, which had stood so many successions of ages and shocks of civil violences, and were girded at once by justice, and by prejudice, being applied to the payment of debts, comparatively recent, invidious, and contracted by a decried and subverted government?

Was the public estate a sufficient stake for the public debts? Assume that it was not, and that a loss *must* be incurred somewhere—When the only estate lawfully possessed, and which the contracting parties had in

57. * I do not choose to shock the feeling of the moral reader with any quotation of their vulgar, base, and profane language.

58. * Their connection with Turgot and almost all the people of the finance.

contemplation at the time in which their bargain was made, happens to fail, who according to the principles of natural and legal equity, ought to be the sufferer? Certainly it ought to be either the party who trusted, or the party who persuaded him to trust; or both; and not third parties who had no concern with the transaction. Upon any insolvency they ought to suffer who are weak enough to lend upon bad security, or they who fraudulently held out a security that was not valid. Laws are acquainted with no other rules of decision. But by the new institute of the rights of men, the only persons, who in equity ought to suffer, are the only persons who are to be saved harmless: those are to answer the debt who neither were lenders nor borrowers, mortgagers nor mortgagees.

What had the clergy to do with these transactions? What had they to do with any public engagement further than the extent of their own debt? To that, to be sure, their estates were bound to the last acre. Nothing can lead more to the true spirit of the Assembly, which fits for public confiscation, with its new equity, and its new morality, than an attention to their proceeding with regard to this debt of the clergy. The body of confiscators, true to that monied interest for which they were false to every other, have found the clergy competent to incur a legal debt. Of course they declared

them legally entitled to the property which their power of incurring the debt and mortgaging the estate implied; recognising the rights of those persecuted citizens, in the very act in which they were thus grossly violated.

If, as I said, any persons are to make good deficiencies to the public creditor, besides the public at large, they must be those who managed the agreement. Why therefore are not the estates of all the comptrollers-general confiscated?[59] Why not those of the long succession of ministers, financiers, and bankers who have been enriched whilst the nation was impoverished by their dealings and their counsels? Why is not the estate of M. Laborde declared forfeited rather than of the archbishop of Paris, who has had nothing to do in the creation or in the jobbing of the public funds? Or, if you must confiscate old landed estates in favour of the money-jobbers, why is the penalty confined to one description? I do not know whether the expenses of the Duke de Choiseul have left anything of the infinite sums which he had derived from the bounty of his master, during the transactions of a reign which contributed largely by every species of prodigality in war and peace, to the present debt of France. If any such remains, why is not this confiscated? I remember to have been in Paris during the time of the old government.

59. * All have been confiscated in their turn.

I was there just after the Duke d'Aiguillon had been snatched (as it was generally thought) from the block by the hand of a protecting despotism. He was a minister, and had some concern in the affairs of that prodigal period. Why do I not see his estate delivered up to the municipalities in which it is situated? The noble family of Noailles have long been servants (meritorious servants I admit) to the crown of France, and have had of course some share in its bounties. Why do I hear nothing of the application of their estates to the public debt? Why is the estate of the Duke de Rochefoucault more sacred than that of the Cardinal de Rochefoucault? The former is, I doubt not, a worthy person; and (if it were not a sort of profaneness to talk of the use, as affecting the title to property) he makes a good use of his revenues; but it is no disrespect to him to say, what authentic information well warrants me in saying, that the use made of a property equally valid, by his brother the cardinal archbishop of Rouen, was far more laudable and far more public-spirited.[60] Can one hear of the proscription of such persons,

and the confiscation of their effects, without indignation and horror? He is not a man who does not feel such emotions on such occasions. He does not deserve the name of a free-man who will not express them.

Few barbarous conquerors have ever made so terrible a revolution in property. None of the heads of the Roman factions, when they established "*crudelem illam hastam*" in all their auctions of rapine, have ever set up to sale the goods of the conquered citizen to such an enormous amount.[61] It must be allowed in favour of those tyrants of antiquity, that what was done by them could hardly be said to be done in cold blood. Their passions were inflamed, their tempers soured, their understandings confused, with the spirit of revenge, with the innumerable reciprocated and recent inflictions and retaliations of blood and rapine. They were driven beyond all bounds of moderation by the apprehension of the return of power with the return of property, to the families of those they had injured beyond all hope of forgiveness.

These Roman confiscators, who were yet only in the elements of tyranny, and were not instructed in the rights of men to exercise all sorts of cruelties on each other without provocation, thought it necessary to spread a sort of colour over their injustice.

60. * Not his brother, nor any near relation; but this mistake does not affect the argument.

61. *crudelem illam hastam:* that cruel spear—a phrase that refers to a Roman custom of driving a spear into the ground when the goods of a defeated enemy were to be auctioned

They considered the vanquished party as composed of traitors who had borne arms, or otherwise had acted with hostility, against the commonwealth. They regarded them as persons who had forfeited their property by their crimes. With you, in your improved state of the human mind, there was no such formality. You seized upon five millions sterling of annual rent, and turned forty or fifty thousand human creatures out of their houses, because "such was your pleasure." The tyrant Harry the Eighth of England, as he was not better enlightened than the Roman Mariuses and Sullas, and had not studied in your new schools, did not know what an effectual instrument of despotism was to be found in that grand magazine of offensive weapons, the rights of men. When he resolved to rob the abbeys, as the club of the Jacobins have robbed all the ecclesiastics, he began by setting on foot a commission to examine into the crimes and abuses which prevailed in those communities. As it might be expected, his commission

reported truths, exaggerations, and falsehoods. But truly or falsely, it reported abuses and offences. However, as abuses might be corrected, as every crime of persons does not infer a forfeiture with regard to communities, and as property, in that dark age, was not discovered to be a creature of prejudice, all those abuses (and there were enow of them) were hardly thought sufficient ground for such a confiscation as it was for his purpose to make. He therefore procured the formal surrender of these estates. All these operose proceedings were adopted by one of the most decided tyrants in the rolls of history, as necessary preliminaries, before he could venture, by bribing the members of his two servile houses with a share of the spoil, and holding out to them an eternal immunity from taxation, to demand a confirmation of his iniquitous proceedings by an act of parliament. Had fate reserved him to our times, four technical terms would have done his business, and saved him all this trouble; he needed nothing more than one short form of incantation—"*Philosophy, Light, Liberality, the Rights of Men.*"

I can say nothing in praise of those acts of tyranny, which no voice has hitherto ever commended under any of their false colours; yet in these false colours an homage was paid by despotism to justice. The power which was above all fear and all remorse was not set above all shame. Whilst shame keeps its watch, virtue is not wholly extinguished in the heart; nor will moderation be utterly exiled from the minds of tyrants.

I believe every honest man sympathizes in his reflections with our political poet on that occasion, and will pray to avert the omen whenever these acts of rapacious despotism present themselves to his view or his imagination:

> —May no such storm
> Fall on our times, where ruin must reform.
> Tell me (my Muse) what monstrous dire offence,
> What crimes could any Christian king incense
> To such a rage? Was 't luxury, or lust?
> Was *he* so temperate, so chaste, so just?
> Were these their crimes? they were his own much more,
> But wealth is crime enough to him that's poor.[62]

62. * The rest of the passage is this—

> Who having spent the treasures of his crown,
> Condemns their luxury to feed his own.
> And yet this act, to varnish o'er the shame

Of sacrilege, must bear devotion's name.
No crime so bold, but would be understood
A real, or at least a seeming good;
Who fears not to do ill, yet fears the name,
And, free from conscience, is a slave to fame.
Thus he the church at once protects, and spoils;
But princes' swords are sharper than their styles.
And thus to th' ages past he makes amends,
Their charity destroys, their faith defends.
Then did religion in a lazy cell,
In empty aëry contemplation dwell;
And, like the block, unmoved lay; but ours,
As much too active, like the stork devours.
Is there no temperate region can be known,
Betwixt their frigid and our torrid zone?
Could we not wake from that lethargic dream,
But to be restless in a worse extreme?
And for that lethargy was there no cure,
But to be cast into a calenture?
Can knowledge have no bound, but must advance
So far, to make us wish for ignorance?
And rather in the dark to grope our way,
Than, led by a false guide, to err by day?
Who sees these dismal heaps, but would demand,
What barbarous invader sacked the land?
But when he hears, no Goth, no Turk did bring

This same wealth, which is at all times treason and *lese nation* to indigent and rapacious despotism, under all modes of polity, was your temptation to violate property, law, and religion, united in one object. But was the state of France so wretched and undone, that no other resource but rapine remained to preserve its existence? On this point I wish to receive some information. When the states met, was the condition of the finances of France such, that, after economizing on principles of justice and mercy through all departments, no fair repartition of burthens upon all the orders could possibly restore them? If such an equal imposition would have been sufficient, you well know it might easily have been made. M. Necker, in the budget which he laid before the orders assembled at Versailles, made a detailed exposition of the state of the French nation.[63]

If we give credit to him, it was not necessary to have recourse to any new impositions whatsoever, to put the receipts of France on a balance with its expenses. He stated the permanent charges of all descriptions, including the interest of a new loan of four hundred millions, at 531,444,000 livres; the fixed revenue at 475,294,000, making the deficiency 56,150,000, or

short of £2,200,000 sterling. But to balance it, he brought forward savings and improvements of revenue (considered as entirely certain) to rather more than the amount of that deficiency; and he concludes with these emphatical words, (p. 39,) “Quel pays, Messieurs, que celui, où, *sans impôts* et avec de simples objets *inapperçus,* on peut faire disparoître un deficit qui a fait tant de bruit en Europe.”[64] As to the reimbursement, the sinking of debt, and the other great objects of public credit and political arrangement indicated in Mons. Necker’s speech, no doubt could be entertained, but that a very moderate and proportioned assessment on the citizens without distinction would have provided for all of them to the fullest extent of their demand.

If this representation of Mons.

> This desolation, but a Christian king;
> When nothing, but the name of zeal, appears
> ’Twixt our best actions and the worst of theirs,
> What does he think our sacrilege would spare,
> When such th’ effects of our devotion are?
> Cooper’s Hill, by Sir John Denham

63. * Rapport de Mons. le Directeur-Général des Finances, fait par ordre du Roi à Versailles. Mai 5, 1789.

64. [“What a country, Gentlemen, that can make a deficit, known widely throughout Europe, disappear without taxes and with a few simple and previously unobserved objectives.”]

Necker was false, then the Assembly are in the highest degree culpable for having forced the king to accept as his minister, and since the king’s deposition, for having employed, as *their* minister, a man who had been capable of abusing so notoriously the confidence of his master and their own; in a matter too of the highest moment, and directly appertaining to his particular office. But if the representation was exact, (as having always, along with you, conceived a high degree of respect for M. Necker, I make no doubt it was,) then what can be said in favour of those, who, instead of moderate, reasonable, and general contribution, have in cold blood, and impelled by no necessity, had recourse to a partial and cruel confiscation?

Was that contribution refused on a pretext of privilege, either on the part of the clergy, or on that of the nobility? No, certainly. As to the clergy, they even ran before the wishes of the third order. Previous to the meeting of the states, they had in all their instructions expressly directed their deputies to renounce every immunity, which put them upon a footing distinct from the

condition of their fellow-subjects. In this renunciation the clergy were even more explicit than the nobility.

But let us suppose that the deficiency had remained at the fifty-six millions, (or £2,200,000 sterling,) as at first stated by M. Necker. Let us allow that all the resources he opposed to that deficiency were impudent and groundless fictions; and that the Assembly (or their lords of articles[65] at the Jacobins) were from thence justified in laying the whole burthen of that deficiency on the clergy,—yet allowing all this, a necessity of £2,200,000 sterling will not support a confiscation to the amount of five millions. The imposition of £2,200,000 on the clergy, as partial, would have been oppressive and unjust, but it would not have been altogether ruinous to those on whom it was imposed; and therefore it would not have answered the real purpose of the managers.

Perhaps persons unacquainted with the state of France, on hearing the clergy and the noblesse were privileged in point of taxation, may be led to imagine, that, previous to the Revolution, these bodies had contributed nothing to the state. This is a great mistake. They certainly did not contribute equally with each other, nor either of them equally with the commons. They both however contributed largely. Neither nobility nor clergy enjoyed any exemption from the excise on consumable commodities, from duties of custom, or from any of the other numerous *indirect* impositions, which in France, as well as here, make so very large a proportion of all payments to the public.

65. * In the constitution of Scotland, during the Stuart reigns, a committee sat for preparing bills; and none could pass, but those previously approved by them. The committee was called lords of articles.

The noblesse paid the capitation. They paid also a land-tax, called the twentieth penny, to the height sometimes of three, sometimes of four, shillings in the pound; both of them *direct* impositions of no light nature, and no trivial produce. The clergy of the provinces annexed by conquest to France, (which in extent make about an eighth part of the whole, but in wealth a much larger proportion,) paid likewise to the capitation and the twentieth penny, at the rate paid by the nobility. The clergy in the old provinces did not pay the capitation; but they had redeemed themselves at the expense of about 24 millions, or a little more than a million sterling. They were exempted from the twentieths: but then they made free gifts;

they contracted debts for the state; and they were subject to some other charges, the whole computed at about a thirteenth part of their clear income. They ought to have paid annually about forty thousand pounds more, to put them on a par with the contribution of the nobility.

When the terrors of this tremendous proscription hung over the clergy, they made an offer of a contribution, through the archbishop of Aix, which, for its extravagance, ought not to have been accepted. But it was evidently and obviously more advantageous to the public creditor, than anything which could rationally be promised by the confiscation. Why was it not accepted? The reason is plain—There was no desire that the church should be brought to serve the state. The service of the state was made a pretext to destroy the church. In their way to the destruction of the church they would not scruple to destroy their country: and they have destroyed it. One great end in the project would have been defeated, if the plan of extortion had been adopted in lieu of the scheme of confiscation. The new landed interest connected with the new republic, and connected with it for its very being, could not have been created. This was among the reasons why that extravagant ransom was not accepted.

The madness of the project of confiscation, on the plan that was first pretended, soon became apparent. To bring this unwieldy mass of landed property, enlarged by the confiscation of all the vast landed domain of the crown, at once into market, was obviously to defeat the profits proposed by the confiscation, by depreciating the value of those lands, and indeed of all the landed estates throughout France. Such a sudden diversion of all its circulating money from trade to land, must be an additional mischief. What step was taken? Did the Assembly, on becoming sensible of the inevitable ill effects of their projected sale, revert to the offers of the clergy? No distress could oblige them to travel in a course which was disgraced by any appearance of justice. Giving over all hopes from a general immediate sale, another project seems to have succeeded. They proposed to take stock in exchange for the church lands. In that project great difficulties arose in equalizing the objects to be exchanged. Other obstacles also presented themselves, which threw them back again upon some project of sale. The municipalities had taken an alarm. They would not hear of transferring the whole plunder of the kingdom to the stock-holders in Paris. Many of those municipalities had been (upon system) reduced to the most deplorable indigence. Money was nowhere to be seen. They were therefore led to the

point that was so ardently desired. They panted for a currency of any kind which might revive their perishing industry. The municipalities were then to be admitted to a share in the spoil, which evidently rendered the first scheme (if ever it had been seriously entertained) altogether impracticable. Public exigencies pressed upon all sides. The minister of finance reiterated his call for supply with a most urgent, anxious, and boding voice. Thus pressed on all sides, instead of the first plan of converting their bankers into bishops and abbots, instead of paying the old debt, they contracted a new debt, at 3 per cent, creating a new paper currency, founded on an eventual sale of the church lands. They issued this paper currency to satisfy in the first instance chiefly the demands made upon them by the *bank of discount,* the great machine, or paper-mill, of their fictitious wealth.

The spoil of the church was now become the only resource of all their operations in finance, the vital principle of all their politics, the sole security for the existence of their power. It was necessary by all, even the most violent means, to put every individual on the same bottom, and to bind the nation in one guilty interest to uphold this act, and the authority of those by whom it was done. In order to force the most reluctant into a participation of their pillage, they rendered their paper circulation compulsory in all payments. Those who consider the general tendency of their schemes to this one object as a centre, and a centre from which afterwards all their measures radiate, will not think that I dwell too long upon this part of the proceedings of the National Assembly.

To cut off all appearance of connexion between the crown and public justice, and to bring the whole under implicit obedience to the dictators in Paris, the old independent judicature of the parliaments, with all its merits, and all its faults, was wholly abolished. Whilst the parliaments existed, it was evident that the people might some time or other come to resort to them, and rally under the standard of their ancient laws. It became however a matter of consideration that the magistrates and officers, in the courts now abolished, *had purchased their places* at a very high rate, for which, as well as for the duty they performed, they received but a very low return of interest. Simple confiscation is a boon only for the clergy;—to the lawyers some appearances of equity are to be observed; and they are to receive compensation to an immense amount. Their compensation becomes part of the national debt, for the liquidation of which there is the one exhaustless fund. The lawyers are to obtain their compensation in the new church paper,

which is to march with the new principles of judicature and legislature. The dismissed magistrates are to take their share of martyrdom with the ecclesiastics, or to receive their own property from such a fund, and in such a manner, as all those, who have been seasoned with the ancient principles of jurisprudence, and had been the sworn guardians of property, must look upon with horror. Even the clergy are to receive their miserable allowance out of the depreciated paper, which is stamped with the indelible character of sacrilege, and with the symbols of their own ruin, or they must starve. So violent an outrage upon credit, property, and liberty, as this compulsory paper currency, has seldom been exhibited by the alliance of bankruptcy and tyranny, at any time, or in any nation.

In the course of all these operations, at length comes out the grand *arcanum;*—that in reality, and in a fair sense, the lands of the church (so far as anything certain can be gathered from their proceedings) are not to be sold at all. By the late resolutions of the National Assembly, they are indeed to be delivered to the highest bidder. But it is to be observed, that *a certain portion only of the purchase money is to be laid down.* A period of twelve years is to be given for the payment of the rest. The philosophic purchasers are therefore, on payment of a sort of fine, to be put instantly into possession of the estate. It becomes in some respects a sort of gift to them; to be held on the feudal tenure of zeal to the new establishment. This project is evidently to let in a body of purchasers without money. The consequence will be, that these purchasers, or rather grantees, will pay, not only from the rents as they accrue, which might as well be received by the state, but from the spoil of the materials of buildings, from waste in woods, and from whatever money, by hands habituated to the gripings of usury, they can wring from the miserable peasant. He is to be delivered over to the mercenary and arbitrary discretion of men, who will be stimulated to every species of extortion by the growing demands on the growing profits of an estate held under the precarious settlement of a new political system.

When all the frauds, impostures, violences, rapines, burnings, murders, confiscations, compulsory paper currencies, and every description of tyranny and cruelty employed to bring about and to uphold this Revolution, have their natural effect, that is, to shock the moral sentiments of all virtuous and sober minds, the abettors of this philosophic system immediately strain their throats in a declamation against the old monarchical government of France. When they have rendered that deposed

power sufficiently black, they then proceed in argument, as if all those who disapprove of their new abuses must of course be partisants of the old; that those who reprobate their crude and violent schemes of liberty ought to be treated as advocates for servitude. I admit that their necessities do compel them to this base and contemptible fraud. Nothing can reconcile men to their proceedings and projects, but the supposition that there is no third option between them and some tyranny as odious as can be furnished by the records of history, or by the invention of poets. This prattling of theirs hardly deserves the name of sophistry. It is nothing but plain impudence. Have these gentlemen never heard, in the whole circle of the worlds of theory and practice, of anything between the despotism of the monarch and the despotism of the multitude? Have they never heard of a monarchy directed by laws, controlled and balanced by the great hereditary wealth and hereditary dignity of a nation; and both again controlled by a judicious check from the reason and feeling of the people at large, acting by a suitable and permanent organ? Is it then impossible that a man may be found, who, without criminal ill intention, or pitiable absurdity, shall prefer such a mixed and tempered government to either of the extremes; and who may repute that nation to be destitute of all wisdom and of all virtue, which, having in its choice to obtain such a government with ease, *or rather to confirm it when actually possessed,* thought proper to commit a thousand crimes, and to subject their country to a thousand evils, in order to avoid it? Is it then a truth so universally acknowledged, that a pure democracy is the only tolerable form into which human society can be thrown, that a man is not permitted to hesitate about its merits, without the suspicion of being a friend to tyranny, that is, of being a foe to mankind?

I do not know under what description to class the present ruling authority in France. It affects to be a pure democracy, though I think it in a direct train of becoming shortly a mischievous and ignoble oligarchy. But for the present I admit it to be a contrivance of the nature and effect of what it pretends to. I reprobate no form of government merely upon abstract principles. There may be situations in which the purely democratic form will become necessary. There may be some (very few, and very particularly circumstanced) where it would be clearly desirable. This I do not take to be the case of France, or of any other great country. Until now, we have seen no examples of considerable democracies. The ancients were better acquainted with them. Not being wholly unread in the authors, who had

seen the most of those constitutions, and who best understood them, I cannot help concurring with their opinion, that an absolute democracy, no more than absolute monarchy, is to be reckoned among the legitimate forms of government. They think it rather the corruption and degeneracy, than the sound constitution of a republic. If I recollect rightly, Aristotle observes, that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny.[66] Of this I am certain, that in a democracy, the majority of the citizens is capable of exercising the most cruel oppressions upon the minority, whenever strong divisions prevail in that kind of polity, as they often must; and that oppression of the minority will extend to far greater numbers, and will be carried on with much greater fury, than can almost ever be apprehended from the dominion of a single sceptre. In such a popular persecution, individual sufferers are in a much more deplorable condition than in any other. Under a cruel prince they have the balmy compassion of mankind to assuage the smart of their wounds; they have the plaudits of the people to animate their generous constancy under their sufferings: but those who are subjected to wrong under multitudes, are deprived of all external consolation. They seem deserted by mankind, overpowered by a conspiracy of their whole species.

But admitting democracy not to have that inevitable tendency to party tyranny, which I suppose it to have, and admitting it to possess as much good in it when unmixed, as I am sure it possesses when compounded with other forms; does monarchy, on its part, contain nothing at all to recommend it? I do not often quote Bolingbroke, nor have his works in general left any permanent impression on my mind. He is a presumptuous and a superficial writer. But he has one observation, which, in my opinion, is not without depth and solidity. He says, that he prefers a monarchy to other governments; because you can better ingraft any description of republic on a monarchy than anything of monarchy upon the republican forms. I think him perfectly in the right.

66. * When I wrote this I quoted from memory, after many years had elapsed from my reading the passage. A learned friend has found it, and it is as follows:

Τὸ ἦθος τὸ αὐτὸ, καὶ ἄμφω δεσποτικὰ τῶν βελτιόνων, καὶ τὰ ψηφίσματα, ὥσπερ ἐκεὶ τὰ ἐπιταγματὰ· καὶ ὁ δημαγωγος καὶ ὸ κόλαξ, οί αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀνάλογοι· καὶ μάλιστα ἑκάτεροι παρ᾽ ἑκατέροις ἰσχύουσιν, οί μὲν κόλακες παρὰ τυράννοις, οὶ δὲ δημαγωγοὶ παρὰ τοῖς δήμοις τοῖς τοιούτοις.

"The ethical character is the same; both exercise despotism over the better class of citizens; and decrees are in the one, what ordinances and arrêts are in the other: the demagogue, too, and the court favorite are not unfrequently the same identical men, and always bear a close analogy; and these have the principal power, each in their respective forms of government, favorites with the absolute monarch, and demagogues with a people such as I have described." Aristotle, *Politics*, lib. iv. cap. 4.

The fact is so historically; and it agrees well with the speculation.

I know how easy a topic it is to dwell on the faults of departed greatness. By a revolution in the state, the fawning sycophant of yesterday is converted into the austere critic of the present hour. But steady, independent minds, when they have an object of so serious a concern to mankind as government under their contemplation, will disdain to assume the part of satirists and declaimers. They will judge of human institutions as they do of human characters. They will sort out the good from the evil, which is mixed in mortal institutions, as it is in mortal men.

Your government in France, though usually, and I think justly, reputed the best of the unqualified or ill-qualified monarchies, was still full of abuses. These abuses accumulated in a length of time, as they must accumulate in every monarchy not under the constant inspection of a popular representative. I am no stranger to the faults and defects of the subverted government of France; and I think I am not inclined by nature or policy to make a panegyric upon anything which is a just and natural object of censure. But the question is not now of the vices of that monarchy, but of its existence. Is it then true, that the French government was such as to be incapable or undeserving of reform; so that it was of absolute necessity that the whole fabric should be at once pulled down, and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretic, experimental edifice in its place? All France was of a different opinion in the beginning of the year 1789. The instructions to the representatives to the states-general, from every district in that kingdom, were filled with projects for the reformation of that government, without the remotest suggestion of a design to destroy it. Had such a design been then even insinuated, I believe there would have been but one voice, and that voice for rejecting it with scorn and horror. Men have been sometimes led by degrees, sometimes hurried, into things of which, if they could have seen the whole together, they never would have permitted the most remote approach. When those instructions were given, there was no question but that abuses existed, and that they demanded a reform; nor is there now. In the interval between the instructions and the Revolution, things changed

their shape; and, in consequence of that change, the true question at present is, Whether those who would have reformed, or those who have destroyed, are in the right?

To hear some men speak of the late monarchy of France, you would imagine that they were talking of Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword of Tahmas Kouli Khân; or at least describing the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey, where the finest countries in the most genial climates in the world are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war; where arts are unknown, where manufactures languish, where science is extinguished, where agriculture decays, where the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer. Was this the case of France? I have no way of determining the question but by a reference to facts. Facts do not support this resemblance. Along with much evil, there is some good in monarchy itself; and some corrective to its evil from religion, from laws, from manners, from opinions, the French monarchy must have received; which rendered it (though by no means a free, and therefore by no means a good, constitution) a despotism rather in appearance than in reality.

Among the standards upon which the effects of government on any country are to be estimated, I must consider the state of its population as not the least certain. No country in which population flourishes, and is in progressive improvement, can be under a *very* mischievous government. About sixty years ago, the Intendants of the generalities of France made, with other matters, a report of the population of their several districts. I have not the books, which are very voluminous, by me, nor do I know where to procure them, (I am obliged to speak by memory, and therefore the less positively,) but I think the population of France was by them, even at that period, estimated at twenty-two millions of souls. At the end of the last century it had been generally calculated at eighteen. On either of these estimations, France was not ill peopled. M. Necker, who is an authority for his own time at least equal to the Intendants for theirs, reckons, and upon apparently sure principles, the people of France, in the year 1780 at twenty-four millions six hundred and seventy thousand. But was this the probable ultimate term under the old establishment? Dr. Price is of opinion, that the growth of population in France was by no means at its *acmé* in that year. I certainly defer to Dr. Price's authority a good deal more in these speculations, than I do in his general politics. This gentleman, taking

ground on M. Necker's data, is very confident that since the period of that minister's calculation, the French population has increased rapidly; so rapidly, that in the year 1789 he will not consent to rate the people of that kingdom at a lower number than thirty millions. After abating much (and much I think ought to be abated) from the sanguine calculation of Dr. Price, I have no doubt that the population of France did increase considerably during this later period: but supposing that it increased to nothing more than will be sufficient to complete the twenty-four millions six hundred and seventy thousand to twenty-five millions, still a population of twenty-five millions, and that in an increasing progress, on a space of about twenty-seven thousand square leagues, is immense. It is, for instance, a good deal more than the proportionable population of this island, or even than that of England, the best peopled part of the united kingdom.

It is not universally true, that France is a fertile country. Considerable tracts of it are barren, and labour under other natural disadvantages. In the portions of that territory where things are more favourable, as far as I am able to discover, the numbers of the people correspond to the indulgence of nature.[67] The Generality of Lisle (this I admit is the strongest example) upon an extent of four hundred and four leagues and a half, about ten years ago, contained seven hundred and thirty-four thousand six hundred souls, which is one thousand seven hundred and seventy-two inhabitants to each square league. The middle term for the rest of France is about nine hundred inhabitants to the same admeasurement.

I do not attribute this population to the deposed government; because I do not like to compliment the contrivances of men with what is due in a great degree to the bounty of Providence. But that decried government could not have obstructed, most probably it favoured, the operation of those causes, (whatever they were,) whether of nature in the soil, or habits of industry among the people, which has produced so large a number of the species throughout that whole kingdom, and exhibited in some particular places such prodigies of population. I never will suppose that fabric of a state to be the worst of all political institutions, which, by experience, is found to contain a principle favourable (however latent it may be) to the increase of mankind.

The wealth of a country is another, and no contemptible standard, by which we may judge whether, on the whole, a government be protecting or destructive. France far exceeds England in the multitude of her people; but I

apprehend that her comparative wealth is much inferior to ours; that it is not so equal in the distribution, nor so ready in the circulation. I believe the difference in the form of the two governments to be amongst the causes of this advantage on the side of England. I speak of England, not of the whole British dominions; which, if compared with those of France, will, in some degree, weaken the comparative rate of wealth upon our side. But that wealth, which will not endure a comparison with the riches of England, may constitute a very respectable degree of opulence. M. Necker's book, published in 1785,[68] contains an accurate and interesting collection of facts relative to public economy and to political arithmetic; and his speculations on the subject are in general wise and liberal. In that work he gives an idea of the state of France, very remote from the portrait of a country whose government was a perfect grievance, an absolute evil, admitting no cure but through the violent and uncertain remedy of a total revolution.

67. * De l'Administration des Finances de la France, par Mons. Necker, vol. i, p. 288.
68. * De l'Administration des Finances de la France, par Mons. Necker.

He affirms, that from the year 1726 to the year 1784, there was coined at the mint of France, in the species of gold and silver, to the amount of about one hundred millions of pounds sterling.[69]

It is impossible that M. Necker should be mistaken in the amount of the bullion which has been coined in the mint. It is a matter of official record. The reasonings of this able financier, concerning the quantity of gold and silver which remained for circulation, when he wrote in 1785, that is, about four years before the deposition and imprisonment of the French king, are not of equal certainty; but they are laid on grounds so apparently solid, that it is not easy to refuse a considerable degree of assent to his calculation. He calculates the *numeraire,* or what we call *specie,* then actually existing in France, at about eighty-eight millions of the same English money. A great accumulation of wealth for one country, large as that country is! M. Necker was so far from considering this influx of wealth as likely to cease, when he wrote in 1785, that he presumes upon a future annual increase of two per cent. upon the money brought into France during the periods from which he computed.

Some adequate cause must have originally introduced all the money coined at its mint into that Kingdom; and some cause as operative must

have kept at home, or returned into its bosom, such a vast flood of treasure as M. Necker calculates to remain for domestic circulation. Suppose any reasonable deductions from M. Necker's computation, the remainder must still amount to an immense sum. Causes thus powerful to acquire, and to retain, cannot be found in discouraged industry, insecure property, and a positively destructive government.

69. * [Ibid.,] Vol. iii chap. 8 and chap. 9.

Indeed, when I consider the face of the kingdom of France; the multitude and opulence of her cities; the useful magnificence of her spacious high roads and bridges; the opportunity of her artificial canals and navigations opening the conveniences of maritime communication through a solid continent of so immense an extent; when I turn my eyes to the stupendous works of her ports and harbours, and to her whole naval apparatus, whether for war or trade; when I bring before my view the number of her fortifications, constructed with so bold and masterly a skill, and made and maintained at so prodigious a charge, presenting an armed front and impenetrable barrier to her enemies upon every side; when I recollect how very small a part of that extensive region is without cultivation, and to what complete perfection the culture of many of the best productions of the earth have been brought in France; when I reflect on the excellence of her manufactures and fabrics, second to none but ours, and in some particulars not second; when I contemplate the grand foundations of charity, public and private; when I survey the state of all the arts that beautify and polish life; when I reckon the men she has bred for extending her fame in war, her able statesmen, the multitude of her profound lawyers and theologians, her philosophers, her critics, her historians and antiquaries, her poets and her orators, sacred and profane; I behold in all this something which awes and commands the imagination, which checks the mind on the brink of precipitate and indiscriminate censure, and which demands that we should very seriously examine, what and how great are the latent vices that could authorize us at once to level so spacious a fabric with the ground. I do not recognise in this view of things, the despotism of Turkey. Nor do I discern the character of a government, that has been, on the whole, so oppressive, or so corrupt, or so negligent, as to be utterly unfit *for all reformation.* I must think such a goverment well deserved to have its excellencies

heightened, its faults corrected, and its capacities improved into a British constitution.

Whoever has examined into the proceedings of that deposed government for several years back, cannot fail to have observed, amidst the inconstancy and fluctuation natural to courts, an earnest endeavour towards the prosperity and improvement of the country; he must admit, that it had long been employed, in some instances wholly to remove, in many considerably to correct, the abusive practices and usages that had prevailed in the state; and that even the unlimited power of the sovereign over the persons of his subjects, inconsistent, as undoubtedly it was, with law and liberty, had yet been every day growing more mitigated in the exercise. So far from refusing itself to reformation, that government was open, with a censurable degree of facility, to all sorts of projects and projectors on the subject. Rather too much countenance was given to the spirit of innovation, which soon was turned against those who fostered it, and ended in their ruin. It is but cold, and no very flattering, justice to that fallen monarchy, to say, that, for many years, it trespassed more by levity and want of judgment in several of its schemes, than from any defect in diligence or in public spirit. To compare the government of France for the last fifteen or sixteen years with wise and well-constituted establishments during that, or during any period, is not to act with fairness. But if in point of prodigality in the expenditure of money, or in point of rigour in the exercise of power, it be compared with any of the former reigns, I believe candid judges will give little credit to the good intentions of those who dwell perpetually on the donations to favourites, or on the expenses of the court, or on the horrors of the Bastille, in the reign of Louis the Sixteenth.[70]

Whether the system, if it deserves such a name, now built on the ruins of that ancient monarchy, will be able to give a better account of the population and wealth of the country, which it has taken under its care, is a matter very doubtful. Instead of improving by the change, I apprehend that a long series of years must be told, before it can recover in any degree the effects of this philosophic revolution, and before the nation can be replaced on its former footing. If Dr. Price should think fit, a few years hence, to favour us with an estimate of the population of France, he will hardly be able to make up his tale of thirty millions of souls, as computed in 1789, or the Assembly's computation of twenty-six millions of that year; or even M. Necker's twenty-five millions in 1780. I hear that there are considerable

emigrations from France; and that many, quitting that voluptuous climate, and that seductive *Circean* liberty, have taken refuge in the frozen regions, and under the British despotism, of Canada.

In the present disappearance of coin, no person could think it the same country, in which the present minister of the finances has been able to discover fourscore millions sterling in specie. From its general aspect one would conclude that it had been for some time past under the special direction of the learned academicians of Laputa and Balnibarbi.[71] Already the population of Paris has so declined, that M. Necker stated to the National Assembly the provision to be made for its subsistence at a fifth less than what had formerly been found requisite.[72] It is said (and I have never heard it contradicted) that a hundred thousand people are out of employment in that city, though it is become the seat of the imprisoned court and National Assembly. Nothing, I am credibly informed, can exceed the shocking and disgusting spectacle of mendicancy displayed in that capital. Indeed the votes of the National Assembly leave no doubt of the fact. They have lately appointed a standing committee of mendicancy. They are contriving at once a vigorous police on this subject, and, for the first time, the imposition of a tax to maintain the poor, for whose present relief great sums appear on the face of the public accounts of the year.[73]

70. * The world is obliged to M. de Calonne for the pains he has taken to refute the scandalous exaggerations relative to some of the royal expenses, and to detect the fallacious account given of pensions, for the wicked purpose of provoking the populace to all sorts of crimes.

71. * See Gulliver's Travels for the idea of countries governed by philosophers.

72. * M. de Calonne states the falling off of the population of Paris as far more considerable; and it may be so, since the period of M. Necker's calculation.

In the mean time the leaders of the legislative clubs and coffeehouses are intoxicated with admiration at their own wisdom and ability. They speak with the most sovereign contempt of the rest of the world. They tell the people, to comfort them in the rags with which they have clothed them, that they are a nation of philosophers; and, sometimes, by all the arts of quackish parade, by show, tumult, and bustle, sometimes by the alarms of plots and invasions, they attempt to drown the cries of indigence, and to divert the eyes of the observer from the ruin and wretchedness of the state. A brave people will certainly prefer liberty accompanied with a virtuous poverty to a depraved and wealthy servitude. But before the price of

comfort and opulence is paid, one ought to be pretty sure it is real liberty which is purchased, and that she is to be purchased at no other price. I shall always, however, consider that liberty as very equivocal in her appearance, which has not wisdom and justice for her companions; and does not lead prosperity and plenty in her train.

73. * Travaux de charité

pour subvenir au manque de travail à Paris et dansles provinces	*Livres.* 3,866,920 —	£ 161,121	*s.* 13	*d.* 4
Destruction de vagabondage et de la mendicité	1,671,417 —	69,642	7	6
Primes pour l'importation de grains	5,671,907 —	236,329	9	2
Dépenses relatives aux subsistances, déduction fait des récouvrements qui ont eu lieu	39,871,790 —	1,661,324	11	8
Total	*Livres.* 51,082,034 —	£2,128,418	1	8

When I sent this book to the press, I entertained some doubt concerning the nature and extent of the last article in the above accounts, which is only under a general head, without any detail. Since then I have seen M. de Calonne's work. I must think it a great loss to me that I had not that advantage earlier. M. de Calonne thinks this article to be on account of general subsistence; but as he is not able to comprehend how so great a loss as upwards of £1,661,000 sterling could be sustained on the difference between the price and the sale of grain, he seems to attribute this enormous head of charge to secret expenses of the Revolution. I cannot say anything positively on that subject. The reader is capable of judging, by the aggregate of these immense charges, on the state and condition of France; and the system of public economy adopted in that nation. These articles of account produced no inquiry or discussion in the National Assembly.

The advocates for this Revolution, not satisfied with exaggerating the vices of their ancient government, strike at the fame of their country itself, by painting almost all that could have attracted the attention of strangers, I mean their nobility and their clergy, as objects of horror. If this were only a libel, there had not been much in it. But it has practical consequences. Had your nobility and gentry, who formed the great body of your landed men, and the whole of your military officers, resembled those of Germany, at the period when the Hanse-towns were necessitated to confederate against the nobles in defence of their property—had they been like the *Orsini* and

Vitelli in Italy, who used to sally from their fortified dens to rob the trader and traveller—had they been such as the *Mamelukes* in Egypt, or the *Nayres* on the coast of Malabar, I do admit, that too critical an inquiry might not be advisable into the means of freeing the world from such a nuisance. The statues of Equity and Mercy might be veiled for a moment. The tenderest minds, confounded with the dreadful exigence in which morality submits to the suspension of its own rules in favour of its own principles, might turn aside whilst fraud and violence were accomplishing the destruction of a pretended nobility which disgraced, whilst it persecuted, human nature. The persons most abhorrent from blood, and treason, and arbitrary confiscation, might remain silent spectators of this civil war between the vices.

But did the privileged nobility who met under the king's precept at Versailles, in 1789, or their constituents, deserve to be looked on as the *Nayres* or *Mamelukes* of this age, or as the *Orsini* and *Vitelli* of ancient times? If I had then asked the question I should have passed for a madman. What have they since done that they were to be driven into exile, that their persons should be hunted about, mangled, and tortured, their families dispersed, their houses laid in ashes, and that their order should be abolished, and the memory of it, if possible, extinguished, by ordaining them to change the very names by which they were usually known? Read their instructions to their representatives. They breathe the spirit of liberty as warmly, and they recommend reformation as strongly, as any other order. Their privileges relative to contribution were voluntarily surrendered; as the king, from the beginning, surrendered all pretence to a right of taxation. Upon a free constitution there was but one opinion in France. The absolute monarchy was at an end. It breathed its last, without a groan, without struggle, without convulsion. All the struggle, all the dissension, arose afterwards upon the preference of a despotic democracy to a government of reciprocal control. The triumph of the victorious party was over the principles of a British constitution.

I have observed the affectation, which for many years past, has prevailed in Paris even to a degree perfectly childish, of idolizing the memory of your Henry the Fourth. If anything could put one out of humour with that ornament to the kingly character, it would be this overdone style of insidious panegyric. The persons who have worked this engine the most busily, are those who have ended their panegyrics in dethroning his

successor and descendant; a man, as good-natured, at the least, as Henry the Fourth; altogether as fond of his people; and who has done infinitely more to correct the ancient vices of the state than that great monarch did, or we are sure he ever meant to do. Well it is for his panegyrists that they have not him to deal with. For Henry of Navarre was a resolute, active, and politic prince. He possessed indeed great humanity and mildness; but a humanity and mildness that never stood in the way of his interests. He never sought to be loved without putting himself first in a condition to be feared. He used soft language with determined conduct. He asserted and maintained his authority in the gross, and distributed his acts of concession only in the detail. He spent the income of his prerogative nobly; but he took care not to break in upon the capital; never abandoning for a moment any of the claims which he made under the fundamental laws, nor sparing to shed the blood of those who opposed him, often in the field, sometimes upon the scaffold. Because he knew how to make his virtues respected by the ungrateful, he has merited the praises of those, whom, if they had lived in his time, he would have shut up in the Bastille, and brought to punishment along with the regicides whom he hanged after he had famished Paris into a surrender.

If these panegyrists are in earnest in their admiration of Henry the Fourth, they must remember, that they cannot think more highly of him than he did of the noblesse of France; whose virtue, honour, courage, patriotism, and loyalty were his constant theme.

But the nobility of France are degenerated since the days of Henry the Fourth. This is possible. But it is more than I can believe to be true in any great degree. I do not pretend to know France as correctly as some others; but I have endeavoured through my whole life to make myself acquainted with human nature; otherwise I should be unfit to take even my humble part in the service of mankind. In that study I could not pass by a vast portion of our nature, as it appeared modified in a country but twenty-four miles from the shore of this island. On my best observation, compared with my best inquiries, I found your nobility for the greater part composed of men of high spirit, and of a delicate sense of honour, both with regard to themselves individually, and with regard to their whole corps, over whom they kept, beyond what is common in other countries, a censorial eye. They were tolerably well bred; very officious, humane, and hospitable; in their conversation frank and open; with a good military tone; and reasonably tinctured with literature, particularly of the authors in their own language.

Many had pretensions far above this description. I speak of those who were generally met with.

As to their behaviour to the inferior classes, they appeared to me to comport themselves toward them with good-nature, and with something more nearly approaching to familiarity, than is generally practised with us in the intercourse between the higher and lower ranks of life. To strike any person, even in the most abject condition, was a thing in a manner unknown, and would be highly disgraceful. Instances of other ill-treatment of the humble part of the community were rare: and as to attacks made upon the property or the personal liberty of the commons, I never heard of any whatsoever from *them;* nor, whilst the laws were in vigour under the ancient government, would such tyranny in subjects have been permitted. As men of landed estates, I had no fault to find with their conduct, though much to reprehend, and much to wish changed, in many of the old tenures. Where the letting of their land was by rent, I could not discover that their agreements with their farmers were oppressive; nor when they were in partnership with the farmer, as often was the case, have I heard that they had taken the lion's share. The proportions seemed not inequitable. There might be exceptions; but certainly they were exceptions only. I have no reason to believe that in these respects the landed noblesse of France were worse than the landed gentry of this country; certainly in no respect more vexatious than the landholders, not noble, of their own nation. In cities the nobility had no manner of power; in the country very little. You know, Sir, that much of the civil government, and the police in the most essential parts, was not in the hands of that nobility which presents itself first to our consideration. The revenue, the system and collection of which were the most grievous parts of the French government, was not administered by the men of the sword; nor were they answerable for the vices of its principle, or the vexations, where any such existed, in its management.

Denying, as I am well warranted to do, that the nobility had any considerable share in the oppression of the people, in cases in which real oppression existed, I am ready to admit that they were not without considerable faults and errors. A foolish imitation of the worst part of the manners of England, which impaired their natural character, without substituting in its place what perhaps they meant to copy, has certainly rendered them worse than formerly they were. Habitual dissoluteness of manners continued beyond the pardonable period of life, was more common

amongst them than it is with us; and it reigned with the less hope of remedy, though possibly with something of less mischief, by being covered with more exterior decorum. They countenanced too much that licentious philosophy which has helped to bring on their ruin. There was another error amongst them more fatal. Those of the commons, who approached to or exceeded many of the nobility in point of wealth, were not fully admitted to the rank and estimation which wealth, in reason and good policy, ought to bestow in every country; though I think not equally with that of other nobility. The two kinds of aristocracy were too punctiliously kept asunder; less so, however, than in Germany and some other nations.

This separation, as I have already taken the liberty of suggesting to you, I conceive to be one principal cause of the destruction of the old nobility. The military, particularly, was too exclusively reserved for men of family. But, after all, this was an error of opinion, which a conflicting opinion would have rectified. A permanent assembly, in which the commons had their share of power, would soon abolish whatever was too invidious and insulting in these distinctions; and even the faults in the morals of the nobility would have been probably corrected, by the greater varieties of occupation and pursuit to which a constitution by orders would have given rise.

All this violent cry against the nobility I take to be a mere work of art. To be honoured and even privileged by the laws, opinions, and inveterate usages of our country, growing out of the prejudice of ages, has nothing to provoke horror and indignation in any man. Even to be too tenacious of those privileges is not absolutely a crime. The strong struggle in every individual to preserve possession of what he has found to belong to him, and to distinguish him, is one of the securities against injustice and despotism implanted in our nature. It operates as an instinct to secure property, and to preserve communities in a settled state. What is there to shock in this? Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order. It is the Corinthian capital of polished society. *Omnes boni nobilitati semper favemus,* was the saying of a wise and good man.[74] It is indeed one sign of a liberal and benevolent mind to incline to it with some sort of partial propensity. He feels no ennobling principle in his own heart, who wishes to level all the artificial institutions which have been adopted for giving a body to opinion, and permanence to fugitive esteem. It is a sour, malignant, envious disposition, without taste for the reality, or for any image or

representation of virtue, that sees with joy the unmerited fall of what had long flourished in splendour and in honour.

74. “All we who are good citizens always favour noble birth.” Cicero, *Pro Sestio,* IX, 21.

I do not like to see anything destroyed; any void produced in society; any ruin on the face of the land. It was therefore with no disappointment or dissatisfaction that my inquiries and observations did not present to me any incorrigible vices in the noblesse of France, or any abuse which could not be removed by a reform very short of abolition. Your noblesse did not deserve punishment: but to degrade is to punish.

It was with the same satisfaction I found that the result of my inquiry concerning your clergy was not dissimilar. It is no soothing news to my ears, that great bodies of men are incurably corrupt. It is not with much credulity I listen to any, when they speak evil of those whom they are going to plunder. I rather suspect that vices are feigned or exaggerated, when profit is looked for in their punishment. An enemy is a bad witness; a robber is a worse. Vices and abuses there were undoubtedly in that order, and must be. It was an old establishment, and not frequently revised. But I saw no crimes in the individuals that merited confiscation of their substance, nor those cruel insults and degradations, and that unnatural persecution, which have been substituted in the place of meliorating regulation.

If there had been any just cause for this new religious persecution, the atheistic libellers, who act as trumpeters to animate the populace to plunder, do not love any body so much as not to dwell with complacence on the vices of the existing clergy. This they have not done. They find themselves obliged to rake into the histories of former ages (which they have ransacked with a malignant and profligate industry) for every instance of oppression and persecution which has been made by that body or in its favour, in order to justify, upon very iniquitous, because very illogical, principles of retaliation, their own persecutions, and their own cruelties. After destroying all other genealogies and family distinctions, they invent a sort of pedigree of crimes. It is not very just to chastise men for the offences of their natural ancestors: but to take the fiction of ancestry in a corporate succession, as a ground for punishing men who have no relation to guilty acts, except in names and general descriptions, is a sort of refinement in injustice belonging to the philosophy of this enlightened age. The Assembly punishes

men, many, if not most, of whom abhor the violent conduct of ecclesiastics in former times as much as their present persecutors can do, and who would be as loud and as strong in the expression of that sense, if they were not well aware of the purposes for which all this declamation is employed.

Corporate bodies are immortal for the good of the members, but not for their punishment. Nations themselves are such corporations. As well might we in England think of waging inexpiable war upon all Frenchmen for the evils which they have brought upon us in the several periods of our mutual hostilities. You might, on your part, think yourselves justified in falling upon all Englishmen on account of the unparalleled calamities brought on the people of France by the unjust invasions of our Henries and our Edwards. Indeed we should be mutually justified in this exterminatory war upon each other, full as much as you are in the unprovoked persecution of your present countrymen, on account of the conduct of men of the same name in other times.

We do not draw the moral lessons we might from history. On the contrary, without care it may be used to vitiate our minds and to destroy our happiness. In history a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind. It may, in the perversion, serve for a magazine, furnishing offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state, and supplying the means of keeping alive, or reviving, dissensions and animosities, and adding fuel to civil fury. History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites, which shake the public with the same

> —troublous storms that toss
> The private state, and render life unsweet.[75]

These vices are the *causes* of those storms. Religion, morals, laws, prerogatives, privileges, liberties, rights of men, are the *pretexts.* The pretexts are always found in some specious appearance of a real good. You would not secure men from tyranny and sedition, by rooting out of the mind the principles to which these fraudulent pretexts apply? If you did, you would root out everything that is valuable in the human breast. As these are the pretexts, so the ordinary actors and instruments in great public evils are

kings, priests, magistrates, senates, parliaments, national assemblies, judges, and captains. You would not cure the evil by resolving, that there should be no more monarchs, nor ministers of state, nor of the gospel; no interpreters of law; no general officers; no public councils. You might change the names. The things in some shape must remain. A certain *quantum* of power must always exist in the community, in some hands, and under some appellation. Wise men will apply their remedies to vices, not to names; to the causes of evil which are permanent, not to the occasional organs by which they act, and the transitory modes in which they appear. Otherwise you will be wise historically, a fool in practice.

75. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queen,* II, 7, 14.

Seldom have two ages the same fashion in their pretexts and the same modes of mischief. Wickedness is a little more inventive. Whilst you are discussing fashion, the fashion is gone by. The very same vice assumes a new body. The spirit transmigrates; and far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organs with a fresh vigour of a juvenile activity. It walks abroad, it continues its ravages, whilst you are gibbeting the carcase, or demolishing the tomb. You are terrifying yourselves with ghosts and apparitions, whilst your house is the haunt of robbers. It is thus with all those, who, attending only to the shell and husk of history, think they are waging war with intolerance, pride, and cruelty, whilst, under colour of abhorring the ill principles of antiquated parties, they are authorizing and feeding the same odious vices in different factions, and perhaps in worse.

Your citizens of Paris formerly had lent themselves as the ready instruments to slaughter the followers of Calvin, at the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew. What should we say to those who could think of retaliating on the Parisians of this day the abominations and horrors of that time? They are indeed brought to abhor *that* massacre. Ferocious as they are, it is not difficult to make them dislike it; because the politicians and fashionable teachers have no interest in giving their passions exactly the same direction. Still however they find it their interest to keep the same savage dispositions alive. It was but the other day that they caused this very massacre to be acted on the stage for the diversion of the descendants of those who committed it. In this tragic farce they produced the cardinal of

Lorraine in his robes of function, ordering general slaughter. Was this spectacle intended to make the Parisians abhor persecution, and loathe the effusion of blood?—No; it was to teach them to persecute their own pastors; it was to excite them, by raising a disgust and horror of their clergy, to an alacrity in hunting down to destruction an order, which, if it ought to exist at all, ought to exist not only in safety, but in reverence. It was to stimulate their cannibal appetites (which one would think had been gorged sufficiently) by variety and seasoning; and to quicken them to an alertness in new murders and massacres, if it should suit the purpose of the Guises of the day. An assembly, in which sat a multitude of priests and prelates, was obliged to suffer this indignity at its door. The author was not sent to the galleys, nor the players to the house of correction. Not long after this exhibition, those players came forward to the Assembly to claim the rites of that very religion which they had dared to expose, and to show their prostituted faces in the senate, whilst the archbishop of Paris, whose function was known to his people only by his prayers and benedictions, and his wealth only by his alms, is forced to abandon his house, and to fly from his flock, (as from ravenous wolves,) because, truly, in the sixteenth century, the cardinal of Lorraine was a rebel and a murderer.[76]

Such is the effect of the perversion of history, by those, who, for the same nefarious purposes, have perverted every other part of learning. But those who will stand upon that elevation of reason, which places centuries under our eye, and brings things to the true point of comparison, which obscures little names, and effaces the colours of little parties, and to which nothing can ascend but the spirit and moral quality of human actions, will say to the teachers of the Palais Royal,—The cardinal of Lorraine was the murderer of the sixteenth century, you have the glory of being the murderers in the eighteenth; and this is the only difference between you. But history in the nineteenth century, better understood, and better employed, will, I trust, teach a civilized posterity to abhor the misdeeds of both these barbarous ages. It will teach future priests and magistrates not to retaliate upon the speculative and inactive atheists of future times, the enormities committed by the present practical zealots and furious fanatics of that wretched error, which, in its quiescent state, is more than punished, whenever it is embraced. It will teach posterity not to make war upon either religion or philosophy, for the abuse which the hypocrites of both have made of the two most valuable blessings conferred upon us by the bounty of

the universal Patron, who in all things eminently favours and protects the race of man.

If your clergy, or any clergy, should show themselves vicious beyond the fair bounds allowed to human infirmity, and to those professional faults which can hardly be separated from professional virtues, though their vices never can countenance the exercise of oppression, I do admit, that they would naturally have the effect of abating very much of our indignation against the tyrants who exceed measure and justice in their punishment. I can allow in clergymen, through all their divisions, some tenaciousness of their own opinion, some overflowings of zeal for its propagation, some predilection to their own state and office, some attachment to the interest of their own corps, some preference to those who listen with docility to their doctrines, beyond those who scorn and deride them. I allow all this, because I am a man who have to deal with men, and who would not, through a violence of toleration, run into the greatest of all intolerance. I must bear with infirmities until they fester into crimes.

Undoubtedly, the natural progress of the passions, from frailty to vice, ought to be prevented by a watchful eye and a firm hand.

76. * This is on a supposition of the truth of this story, but he was not in France at the time. One name serves as well as another.

But is it true that the body of your clergy had past those limits of a just allowance? From the general style of your late publications of all sorts, one would be led to believe that your clergy in France were a sort of monsters; an horrible composition of superstition, ignorance, sloth, fraud, avarice, and tyranny. But is this true? Is it true, that the lapse of time, the cessation of conflicting interests, the woeful experience of the evils resulting from party rage, have had no sort of influence gradually to meliorate their minds? Is it true, that they were daily renewing invasions on the civil power, troubling the domestic quiet of their country, and rendering the operations of its government feeble and precarious? Is it true, that the clergy of our times have pressed down the laity with an iron hand, and were, in all places, lighting up the fires of a savage persecution? Did they by every fraud endeavour to increase their estates? Did they use to exceed the due demands on estates that were their own? Or, rigidly screwing up right into wrong, did they convert a legal claim into a vexatious extortion? When not possessed

of power, were they filled with the vices of those who envy it? Were they inflamed with a violent, litigious spirit of controversy? Goaded on with the ambition of intellectual sovereignty, were they ready to fly in the face of all magistracy, to fire churches, to massacre the priests of other descriptions, to pull down altars, and to make their way over the ruins of subverted governments to an empire of doctrine, sometimes flattering, sometimes forcing, the consciences of men from the jurisdiction of public institutions into a submission to their personal authority, beginning with a claim of liberty, and ending with an abuse of power?

These, or some of these, were the vices objected, and not wholly without foundation, to several of the churchmen of former times, who belonged to the two great parties, which then divided and distracted Europe.

If there was in France, as in other countries there visibly is, a great abatement, rather than any increase of these vices, instead of loading the present clergy with the crimes of other men, and the odious character of other times, in common equity they ought to be praised, encouraged, and supported, in their departure from a spirit which disgraced their predecessors, and for having assumed a temper of mind and manners more suitable to their sacred function.

When my occasions took me into France, towards the close of the late reign, the clergy, under all their forms, engaged a considerable part of my curiosity. So far from finding (except from one set of men, not then very numerous, though very active) the complaints and discontents against that body, which some publications had given me reason to expect, I perceived little or no public or private uneasiness on their account. On further examination, I found the clergy, in general, persons of moderate minds and decorous manners; I include the seculars, and the regulars of both sexes. I had not the good fortune to know a great many of the parochial clergy: but in general I received a perfectly good account of their morals, and of their attention to their duties. With some of the higher clergy I had a personal acquaintance; and of the rest in that class, a very good means of information. They were, almost all of them, persons of noble birth. They resembled others of their own rank; and where there was any difference, it was in their favour. They were more fully educated than the military noblesse; so as by no means to disgrace their profession by ignorance, or by want of fitness for the exercise of their authority. They seemed to me, beyond the clerical character, liberal and open; with the hearts of

gentlemen, and men of honour; neither insolent nor servile in their manners and conduct. They seemed to me rather a superior class; a set of men, amongst whom you would not be surprised to find a *Fenelon.* I saw among the clergy in Paris (many of the description are not to be met with anywhere) men of great learning and candour; and I had reason to believe, that this description was not confined to Paris. What I found in other places, I know was accidental; and therefore to be presumed a fair sample. I spent a few days in a provincial town, where, in the absence of the bishop, I passed my evenings with three clergymen, his vicars-general, persons who would have done honour to any church. They were all well informed; two of them of deep, general, and extensive erudition, ancient and modern, oriental and western; particularly in their own profession. They had a more extensive knowledge of our English divines than I expected; and they entered into the genius of those writers with a critical accuracy. One of these gentlemen is since dead, the Abbé *Morangis.* I pay this tribute, without reluctance, to the memory of that noble, reverend, learned, and excellent person; and I should do the same, with equal cheerfulness, to the merits of the others, who I believe are still living, if I did not fear to hurt those whom I am unable to serve.

Some of these ecclesiastics of rank are, by all titles, persons deserving of general respect. They are deserving of gratitude from me, and from many English. If this letter should ever come into their hands, I hope they will believe there are those of our nation who feel for their unmerited fall, and for the cruel confiscation of their fortunes, with no common sensibility. What I say of them is a testimony, as far as one feeble voice can go, which I owe to truth. Whenever the question of this unnatural persecution is concerned, I will pay it. No one shall prevent me from being just and grateful. The time is fitted for the duty; and it is particularly becoming to show our justice and gratitude, when those, who have deserved well of us and of mankind, are labouring under popular obloquy, and the persecutions of oppressive power.

You had before your Revolution about an hundred and twenty bishops. A few of them were men of eminent sanctity, and charity without limit. When we talk of the heroic, of course we talk of rare virtue. I believe the instances of eminent depravity may be as rare amongst them as those of transcendent goodness. Examples of avarice and of licentiousness may be picked out, I do not question it, by those who delight in the investigation

which leads to such discoveries. A man as old as I am will not be astonished that several, in every description, do not lead that perfect life of self-denial, with regard to wealth or to pleasure, which is wished for by all, by some expected, but by none exacted with more rigour, than by those who are the most attentive to their own interests, or the most indulgent to their own passions. When I was in France, I am certain that the number of vicious prelates was not great. Certain individuals among them, not distinguishable for the regularity of their lives, made some amends for their want of the severe virtues, in their possession of the liberal; and were endowed with qualities which made them useful in the church and state. I am told, that, with few exceptions, Louis the Sixteenth had been more attentive to character, in his promotions to that rank, than his immediate predecessor; and I believe (as some spirit of reform has prevailed through the whole reign) that it may be true. But the present ruling power has shown a disposition only to plunder the church. It has punished *all* prelates; which is to favour the vicious, at least in point of reputation. It has made a degrading pensionary establishment, to which no man of liberal ideas or liberal condition will destine his children. It must settle into the lowest classes of the people. As with you the inferior clergy are not numerous enough for their duties; as these duties are, beyond measure, minute and toilsome, as you have left no middle classes of clergy at their ease, in future nothing of science or erudition can exist in the Gallican church. To complete the project, without the least attention to the rights of patrons, the Assembly has provided in future an elective clergy; an arrangement which will drive out of the clerical profession all men of sobriety; all who can pretend to independence in their function or their conduct; and which will throw the whole direction of the public mind into the hands of a set of licentious, bold, crafty, factious, flattering wretches, of such condition and such habits of life as will make their contemptible pensions (in comparison of which the stipend of an exciseman is lucrative and honourable) an object of low and illiberal intrigue. Those officers, whom they still call bishops, are to be elected to a provision comparatively mean, through the same arts, (that is, electioneering arts,) by men of all religious tenets that are known or can be invented. The new lawgivers have not ascertained anything whatsoever concerning their qualifications, relative either to doctrine or to morals; no more than they have done with regard to the subordinate clergy: nor does it appear but that both the higher and the lower may, at their discretion,

practise or preach any mode of religion or irreligion that they please. I do not yet see what the jurisdiction of bishops over their subordinates is to be, or whether they are to have any jurisdiction at all.

In short, Sir, it seems to me, that this new ecclesiastical establishment is intended only to be temporary, and preparatory to the utter abolition, under any of its forms, of the Christian religion, whenever the minds of men are prepared for this last stroke against it, by the accomplishment of the plan for bringing its ministers into universal contempt. They who will not believe, that the philosophical fanatics, who guide in these matters, have long entertained such a design are utterly ignorant of their character and proceedings. These enthusiasts do not scruple to avow their opinion, that a state can subsist without any religion better than with one; and that they are able to supply the place of any good which may be in it, by a project of their own—namely, by a sort of education they have imagined, founded in a knowledge of the physical wants of men; progressively carried to an enlightened self-interest, which, when well understood, they tell us, will identify with an interest more enlarged and public. The scheme of this education has been long known. Of late they distinguish it (as they have got an entirely new nomenclature of technical terms) by the name of a *Civic Education.*

I hope their partisans in England (to whom I rather attribute very inconsiderate conduct, than the ultimate object in this detestable design) will succeed neither in the pillage of the ecclesiastics, nor in the introduction of a principle of popular election to our bishoprics and parochial cures. This, in the present condition of the world, would be the last corruption of the church; the utter ruin of the clerical character; the most dangerous shock that the state ever received through a misunderstood arrangement of religion. I know well enough that the bishoprics and cures, under kingly and seignoral patronage, as now they are in England, and as they have been lately in France, are sometimes acquired by unworthy methods; but the other mode of ecclesiastical canvass subjects them infinitely more surely and more generally to all the evil arts of low ambition, which, operating on and through greater numbers, will produce mischief in proportion.

Those of you, who have robbed the clergy, think that they shall easily reconcile their conduct to all Protestant nations; because the clergy, whom they have thus plundered, degraded, and given over to mockery and scorn,

are of the Roman Catholic, that is, of *their own* pretended persuasion. I have no doubt that some miserable bigots will be found here, as well as elsewhere, who hate sects and parties different from their own, more than they love the substance of religion; and who are more angry with those who differ from them in their particular plans and systems, than displeased with those who attack the foundation of our common hope. These men will write and speak on the subject in the manner that is to be expected from their temper and character. Burnet says, that, when he was in France, in the year 1683, "the method which carried over the men of the finest parts to Popery was this—they brought themselves to doubt of the whole Christian religion. When that was once done, it seemed a more indifferent thing of what side or form they continued outwardly."[77] If this was then the ecclesiastical policy of France, it is what they have since but too much reason to repent of. They preferred atheism to a form of religion not agreeable to their ideas. They succeeded in destroying that form; and atheism has succeeded in destroying them. I can readily give credit to Burnet's story; because I have observed too much of a similar spirit (for a little of it is "much too much") amongst ourselves. The humour, however, is not general.

The teachers who reformed our religion in England bore no sort of resemblance to your present reforming doctors in Paris. Perhaps they were (like those whom they opposed) rather more than could be wished under the influence of a party spirit; but they were more sincere believers; men of the most fervent and exalted piety; ready to die (as some of them did die) like true heroes in defence of their particular ideas of Christianity; as they would with equal fortitude, and more cheerfully, for that stock of general truth, for the branches of which they contended with their blood. These men would have disavowed with horror those wretches who claimed a fellowship with them upon no other titles than those of their having pillaged the persons with whom they maintained controversies, and their having despised the common religion, for the purity of which they exerted themselves with a zeal, which unequivocally bespoke their highest reverence for the substance of that system which they wished to reform. Many of their descendants have retained the same zeal, but (as less engaged in conflict) with more moderation. They do not forget that justice and mercy are substantial parts of religion. Impious men do not recommend themselves to their communion by iniquity and cruelty towards any description of their fellow-creatures.

77. Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time* (London: 1723, 1734), 1: 567.

We hear these new teachers continually boasting of their spirit of toleration. That those persons should tolerate all opinions, who think none to be of estimation, is a matter of small merit. Equal neglect is not impartial kindness. The species of benevolence, which arises from contempt, is no true charity. There are in England abundance of men who tolerate in the true spirit of toleration. They think the dogmas of religion, though in different degrees, are all of moment: and that amongst them there is, as amongst all things of value, a just ground of preference. They favour, therefore, and they tolerate. They tolerate, not because they despise opinions, but because they respect justice. They would reverently and affectionately protect all religions, because they love and venerate the great principle upon which they all agree, and the great object to which they are all directed. They begin more and more plainly to discern, that we have all a common cause, as against a common enemy. They will not be so misled by the spirit of faction, as not to distinguish what is done in favour of their subdivision, from those acts of hostility, which, through some particular description, are aimed at the whole corps, in which they themselves, under another denomination, are included. It is impossible for me to say what may be the character of every description of men amongst us. But I speak for the greater part; and for them, I must tell you, that sacrilege is no part of their doctrine of good works; that, so far from calling you into their fellowship on such title, if your professors are admitted to their communion, they must carefully conceal their doctrine of the lawfulness of the proscription of innocent men; and that they must make restitution of all stolen goods whatsoever. Till then they are none of ours.

You may suppose that we do not approve your confiscation of the revenues of bishops, and deans, and chapters, and parochial clergy possessing independent estates arising from land, because we have the same sort of establishment in England. That objection, you will say, cannot hold as to the confiscation of the goods of monks and nuns, and the abolition of their order. It is true that this particular part of your general confiscation does not affect England, as a precedent in point: but the reason implies, and it goes a great way. The long parliament confiscated the lands of deans and chapters in England on the same ideas upon which your assembly set to sale the lands of the monastic orders. But it is in the principle of injustice that

the danger lies, and not in the description of persons on whom it is first exercised. I see, in a country very near us, a course of policy pursued, which sets justice, the common concern of mankind, at defiance. With the National Assembly of France, possession is nothing, law and usage are nothing. I see the National Assembly openly reprobate the doctrine of prescription, which one of the greatest of their own lawyers tells us, with great truth, is a part of the law of nature.[78] He tells us, that the positive ascertainment of its limits, and its security from invasion, were among the causes for which civil society itself has been instituted. If prescription be once shaken, no species of property is secure, when it once becomes an object large enough to tempt the cupidity of indigent power. I see a practice perfectly correspondent to their contempt of this great fundamental part of natural law. I see the confiscators begin with bishops, and chapters, and monasteries; but I do not see them end there. I see the princes of the blood, who, by the oldest usages of that kingdom, held large landed estates, (hardly with the compliment of a debate,) deprived of their possessions, and, in lieu of their stable, independent property, reduced to the hope of some precarious, charitable pension, at the pleasure of an assembly, which of course will pay little regard to the rights of pensioners at pleasure, when it despises those of legal proprietors. Flushed with the insolence of their first inglorious victories, and pressed by the distresses caused by their lust of unhallowed lucre, disappointed but not discouraged, they have at length ventured completely to subvert all property of all descriptions throughout the extent of a great kingdom. They have compelled all men, in all transactions of commerce, in the disposal of lands, in civil dealing, and through the whole communion of life, to accept as perfect payment and good and lawful tender, the symbols of their speculations on a projected sale of their plunder. What vestiges of liberty or property have they left? The tenant-right of a cabbage-garden, a year's interest in a hovel, the good-will of an ale-house or a baker's shop, the very shadow of a constructive property, are more ceremoniously treated in our parliament, than with you the oldest and most valuable landed possessions, in the hands of the most respectable personages, or than the whole body of the monied and commercial interest of your country. We entertain a high opinion of the legislative authority; but we have never dreamt that parliaments had any right whatever to violate property, to overrule prescription, or to force a currency of their own fiction in the place of that which is real, and

recognised by the law of nations. But you, who began with refusing to submit to the most moderate restraints, have ended by establishing an unheard-of despotism. I find the ground upon which your confiscators go is this; that indeed their proceedings could not be supported in a court of justice; but that the rules of prescription cannot bind a legislative assembly.[79]

78. * [Jean] Domat: a seventeenth-century French jurist
79. * Speech of Mr. Camus, published by order of the National Assembly.

So that this legislative assembly of a free nation sits, not for the security, but for the destruction, of property, and not of property only, but of every rule and maxim which can give it stability, and of those instruments which can alone give it circulation.

When the Anabaptists of Munster, in the sixteenth century, had filled Germany with confusion, by their system of levelling, and their wild opinions concerning property, to what country in Europe did not the progress of their fury furnish just cause of alarm? Of all things, wisdom is the most terrified with epidemical fanaticism, because of all enemies it is that against which she is the least able to furnish any kind of resource. We cannot be ignorant of the spirit of atheistical fanaticism, that is inspired by a multitude of writings, dispersed with incredible assiduity and expense, and by sermons delivered in all the streets and places of public resort in Paris. These writings and sermons have filled the populace with a black and savage atrocity of mind, which supersedes in them the common feelings of nature, as well as all sentiments of morality and religion; insomuch that these wretches are induced to bear with a sullen patience the intolerable distresses brought upon them by the violent convulsions and permutations that have been made in property.[80] The spirit of proselytism attends this spirit of fanaticism.

80. * Whether the following description is strictly true, I know not; but it is what the publishers would have pass for true in order to animate others. In a letter from Toul, given in one of their papers, is the following passage concerning the people of that district: “Dans la Révolution actuelle, ils ont résisté à toutes *les séductions du bigotisme, aux persécutions, et aux tracasseries* des ennemis de la Révolution. *Oubliant leurs plus grânds intérêts* pour rendre hommage aux vues d’ordre général qui ont déterminé l’Assemblée Nationale, ils voient, *sans se plaindre,* supprimer cette foule d’établissemens [*sic*] ecclésiastiques par lesquels *ils subsistoient;* et même, en perdant leur siège épiscopal, la seule de toutes ces ressources qui pouvoit, ou plutôt *qui devoit, en toute équité,* leur être conservée; condamnés *à la plus effrayante misère,* sans avoir *été ni pu être entendus, ils ne*

murmurent point, ils restent fidèles aux principes du plus pur patriotisme; ils sont encore prêts *à verser leur sang* pour le maintien de la Constitution, qui va réduire leur ville *à la plus déplorable nullité*."

[In the current revolution, they have resisted all the seductions of bigotry, all the persecutions and badgerings of the enemies of the revolution. Forgetting their greatest interest to render homage to the views of general order which have driven the National Assembly, they see abolished by the crowd, without complaint, all the ecclesiastical establishments by which they subsisted; and even losing their episcopal seats, the single one of their resources which could, or rather should, in point of equity be preserved to them, condemned to a most frightening misery, without having been heard, they do not complain; they remain faithful to the principle of the purest patriotism.

They have societies to cabal and correspond at home and abroad for the propagation of their tenets. The republic of Berne, one of the happiest, the most prosperous, and the best governed countries upon earth, is one of the great objects, at the destruction of which they aim. I am told they have in some measure succeeded in sowing there the seeds of discontent. They are busy throughout Germany. Spain and Italy have not been untried. England is not left out of the comprehensive scheme of their malignant charity: and in England we find those who stretch out their arms to them, who recommend their example from more than one pulpit, and who choose in more than one periodical meeting, publicly to correspond with them, to applaud them, and to hold them up as objects for imitation; who receive from them tokens of confraternity, and standards consecrated amidst their rights and mysteries;[81] who suggest to them leagues of perpetual amity, at the very time when the power, to which our constitution has exclusively delegated the federative capacity of this kingdom, may find it expedient to make war upon them.

It is not the confiscation of our church property from this example in France that I dread, though I think this would be no trifling evil. The great source of my solicitude is, lest it should ever be considered in England as the policy of a state to seek a resource in confiscations of any kind; or that any one description of citizens should be brought to regard any of the others as their proper prey.[82] Nations are wading deeper and deeper into an ocean of boundless debt.

They are still prepared to shed their blood to maintain the constitution, which is going to reduce their city to the most deplorable nothingness." (Frank M. Turner, trans.)]

These people are not supposed to have endured those sufferings and injustices in a struggle for liberty, for the same account states truly that they had been always free; their patience in beggary and ruin, and their suffering, without remonstrance, the most flagrant and confessed injustice, if strictly

true, can be nothing but the effect of this dire fanaticism. A great multitude all over France is in the same condition and the same temper.

81. * See the proceedings of the confederation at Nantz.

82. * “Si plures sunt ii quibus improbe datum est, quam illi quibus injuste ademptum est, idcirco plus etiam valent? Non enim numero haec judicantur sed pondere. Quam autem habet aequitatem, ut agrum multis annis, aut etiam saeculis ante possessum, qui nullum habuit habeat; qui autem habuit amittat? Ac, propter hoc injuriae genus, Lacedaemonii Lysandrum Ephorum expulerunt: Agin regem (quod nunquam antea apud eos acciderat) necaverunt: exque eo tempore tantae discordiae secutae sunt, ut et tyranni existerint, et optimates exterminarentur, et preclarissime constituta respublica dilaberetur. Nec vero solum ipsa cecidit, sed etiam reliquam Graeciam evertit contagionibus malorum, quae a Lacedaemoniis profectae manarunt latius.”

Public debts, which at first were a security to governments, by interesting many in the public tranquillity, are likely in their excess to become the means of their subversion. If governments provide for these debts by heavy impositions, they perish by becoming odious to the people. If they do not provide for them they will be undone by the efforts of the most dangerous of all parties; I mean an extensive, discontented monied interest, injured and not destroyed. The men who compose this interest look for their security, in the first instance, to the fidelity of government; in the second, to its power. If they find the old governments effete, worn out, and with their springs relaxed, so as not to be of sufficient vigour for their purposes, they may seek new ones that shall be possessed of more energy; and this energy will be derived, not from an acquisition of resources, but from a contempt of justice.

—After speaking of the conduct of the model of true patriots, Aratus of Sicyon, which was in a very different spirit, he says, “Sic par est agere cum civibus; non ut bis jam vidimus, hastam in foro ponere et bona civium voci subjicere praeconis. At ille Graecus (id quod fuit sapientis et praestantis viri) omnibus consulendum esse putavit: eaque est summa ratio et sapientia boni civis, commoda civium non divellere, sed omnes eadem aequitate continere.” Cicero, *De officiis,* 1. 2.

[“Thus even though they to whom property has been wrongfully awarded be more in number than they from whom it has been unjustly taken, they do not for that reason have more influence; for in such matters influence is measured not by numbers but by weight. And how is it fair that a man who never had any property should take possession of lands that had been occupied for many years or even generations, and that he who had them before should lose possession of them?

Now, it was on account of just this sort of wrong-doing that the Spartans banished their ephor Lysander, and put their king Agis to death—an act without precedent in the history of Sparta. From that time on—and for the same reason—dissensions so serious ensured that tyrants arose, the nobles were sent into exile, and the state, though most admirably constituted, crumbled to pieces. Nor did it fall alone, but by the contagion of the ills that, starting in Lacedaemon, spread widely and more widely, it dragged the rest of Greece down to ruin.”

Cicero, *De officiis,* II, 79–80

"That is the right way to deal with one's fellow-citizens, and not, as we have already witnessed on two occasions, to plant the spear in the forum and knock down the property of citizens under the auctioneer's hammer. But yon Greek, like a wise and excellent man, thought that he must look out for the welfare of all. And this is the highest statesmanship and the soundest wisdom on the part of a good citizen, not to divide the interests of the citizens, but to unite all on the basis of impartial justice."

Cicero, *De officiis,* II, 83]

Revolutions are favourable to confiscation; and it is impossible to know under what obnoxious names the next confiscations will be authorized. I am sure that the principles predominant in France extend to very many persons, and descriptions of persons, in all countries who think their innoxious indolence their security. This kind of innocence in proprietors may be argued into inutility; and inutility into an unfitness for their estates. Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow murmuring under ground; a confused movement is felt, that threatens a general earthquake in the political world. Already confederacies and correspondencies of the most extraordinary nature are forming, in several countries.[83] In such a state of things we ought to hold ourselves upon our guard. In all mutations (if mutations must be) the circumstance which will serve most to blunt the edge of their mischief, and to promote what good may be in them, is, that they should find us with our minds tenacious of justice, and tender of property.

But it will be argued, that this confiscation in France ought not to alarm other nations. They say it is not made from wanton rapacity; that it is a great measure of national policy, adopted to remove an extensive, inveterate, superstitious mischief. It is with the greatest difficulty that I am able to separate policy from justice. Justice itself is the great standing policy of civil society; and any eminent departure from it, under any circumstances, lies under the suspicion of being no policy at all.

When men are encouraged to go into a certain mode of life by the existing laws, and protected in that mode as in a lawful occupation—when they have accommodated all their ideas and all their habits to it—when the law had long made their adherence to its rules a ground of reputation, and their departure from them a ground of disgrace and even of penalty—I am sure it is unjust in legislature, by an arbitrary act, to offer a sudden violence to their minds and their feelings; forcibly to degrade them from their state and condition, and to stigmatize with shame and infamy that character, and those customs, which before had been made the measure of their happiness

and honour. If to this be added an expulsion from their habitations, and a confiscation of all their goods, I am not sagacious enough to discover how this despotic sport, made of the feelings, consciences, prejudices, and properties of men, can be discriminated from the rankest tyranny.

83. * See two books entitled, Einige Originalschriften des Illuminatenordens.—System und Folgen des Illuminatenordens. Munchen, 1787. [These volumes reported alleged conspiracies against religion. For a fuller discussion of Burke and conspiracy theories, see the essay of Darrin McMahon in this volume.]

If the injustice of the course pursued in France be clear, the policy of the measure, that is, the public benefit to be expected from it, ought to be at least as evident, and at least as important. To a man who acts under the influence of no passion, who has nothing in view in his projects but the public good, a great difference will immediately strike him between what policy would dictate on the original introduction of such institutions, and on a question of their total abolition, where they have cast their roots wide and deep, and where, by long habit, things more valuable than themselves are so adapted to them, and in a manner interwoven with them, that the one cannot be destroyed without notably impairing the other. He might be embarrassed if the case were really such as sophisters represent it in their paltry style of debating. But in this, as in most questions of state, there is a middle. There is something else than the mere alternative of absolute destruction, or unreformed existence. *Spartam nactus es; hanc exorna.*[84] This is, in my opinion, a rule of profound sense, and ought never to depart from the mind of an honest reformer. I cannot conceive how any man can have brought himself to that pitch of presumption, to consider his country as nothing but *carte blanche,* upon which he may scribble whatever he pleases.[85] A man full of warm, speculative benevolence may wish his society otherwise constituted than he finds it; but a good patriot, and a true politician, always considers how he shall make the most of the existing materials of his country. A disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. Everything else is vulgar in the conception, perilous in the execution.

There are moments in the fortune of states, when particular men are called to make improvements, by great mental exertion. In those moments, even when they seem to enjoy the confidence of their prince and country, and to be invested with full authority, they have not always apt instruments.

A politician, to do great things, looks for a *power,* what our workmen call a *purchase;* and if he finds that power, in politics as in mechanics, he cannot be at a loss to apply it. In the monastic institutions, in my opinion, was found a great *power* for the mechanism of politic benevolence.

84. *Spartam nactus es; hanc exorna:* "Sparta is your lot; now adorn it." The meaning of this remark is that one should make the best of the circumstances in which one finds oneself even if they are as austere as that of Sparta.

85. *carte blanche:* blank check

There were revenues with a public direction; there were men wholly set apart and dedicated to public purposes, without any other than public ties and public principles; men without the possibility of converting the estate of the community into a private fortune; men denied to self-interests, whose avarice is for some community; men to whom personal poverty is honour, and implicit obedience stands in the place of freedom. In vain shall a man look to the possibility of making such things when he wants them. The winds blow as they list. These institutions are the products of enthusiasm; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials; they are the gifts of nature or of chance; her pride is in the use. The perennial existence of bodies corporate and their fortunes are things particularly suited to a man who has long views; who meditates designs that require time in fashioning, and which propose duration when they are accomplished. He is not deserving to rank high, or even to be mentioned in the order of great statesmen, who, having obtained the command and direction of such a power as existed in the wealth, the discipline, and the habits of such corporations, as those which you have rashly destroyed, cannot find any way of converting it to the great and lasting benefit of his country. On the view of this subject, a thousand uses suggest themselves to a contriving mind. To destroy any power, growing wild from the rank productive force of the human mind, is almost tantamount, in the moral world, to the destruction of the apparently active properties of bodies in the material. It would be like the attempt to destroy (if it were in our competence to destroy) the expansive force of fixed air in nitre, or the power of steam, or of electricity, or of magnetism. These energies always existed in nature, and they were always discernible. They seemed, some of them unserviceable, some noxious, some no better than a sport to children; until contemplative ability, combining with practic skill, tamed their wild

nature, subdued them to use, and rendered them at once the most powerful and the most tractable agents, in subservience to the great views and designs of men. Did fifty thousand persons, whose mental and whose bodily labour you might direct, and so many hundred thousand a year of a revenue, which was neither lazy nor superstitious, appear too big for your abilities to wield? Had you no way of using the men but by converting monks into pensioners? Had you no way of turning the revenue to account, but through the improvident resource of a spendthrift sale? If you were thus destitute of mental funds, the proceeding is in its natural course. Your politicians do not understand their trade; and therefore they sell their tools.

But the institutions savour of superstition in their very principle; and they nourish it by a permanent and standing influence. This I do not mean to dispute; but this ought not to hinder you from deriving from superstition itself any resources which may thence be furnished for the public advantage. You derive benefits from many dispositions and many passions of the human mind, which are of as doubtful a colour, in the moral eye, as superstition itself. It was your business to correct and mitigate everything which was noxious in this passion, as in all the passions. But is superstition the greatest of all possible vices? In its possible excess I think it becomes a very great evil. It is, however, a moral subject; and of course admits of all degrees and all modifications. Superstition is the religion of feeble minds; and they must be tolerated in an intermixture of it, in some trifling or some enthusiastic shape or other, else you will deprive weak minds of a resource found necessary to the strongest. The body of all true religion consists, to be sure, in obedience to the will of the Sovereign of the world; in a confidence in his declarations; and in imitation of his perfections. The rest is our own. It may be prejudicial to the great end; it may be auxiliary. Wise men, who as such are not *admirers,* (not admirers at least of the *Munera Terræ,*) are not violently attached to these things, nor do they violently hate them.[86] Wisdom is not the most severe corrector of folly. They are the rival follies, which mutually wage so unrelenting a war; and which make so cruel a use of their advantages, as they can happen to engage the immoderate vulgar, on the one side, or the other, in their quarrels. Prudence would be neuter; but if, in the contention between fond attachment and fierce antipathy concerning things in their nature not made to produce such heats, a prudent man were obliged to make a choice of what errors and excesses of enthusiasm he would condemn or bear, perhaps he would think the

superstition which builds, to be more tolerable than that which demolishes —that which adorns a country, than that which deforms it—that which endows, than that which plunders—that which disposes to mistaken beneficence, than that which stimulates to real injustice—that which leads a man to refuse to himself lawful pleasures, than that which snatches from others the scanty subsistence of their self-denial. Such, I think, is very nearly the state of the question between the ancient founders of monkish superstition, and the superstition of the pretended philosophers of the hour.

For the present I postpone all consideration of the supposed public profit of the sale, which however I conceive to be perfectly delusive. I shall here only consider it as a transfer of property. On the policy of that transfer I shall trouble you with a few thoughts.

86. *Munera Terrae:* Gifts of the earth by which Burke means those which will not last. His reference is to Horace, *Odes,* Book II, xiv, 10.

In every prosperous community something more is produced than goes to the immediate support of the producer. This surplus forms the income of the landed capitalist. It will be spent by a proprietor who does not labour. But this idleness is itself the spring of labour; this repose the spur to industry. The only concern of the state is, that the capital taken in rent from the land, should be returned again to the industry from whence it came; and that its expenditure should be with the least possible detriment to the morals of those who expend it, and to those of the people to whom it is returned.

In all the views of receipt, expenditure, and personal employment, a sober legislator would carefully compare the possessor whom he was recommended to expel, with the stranger who was proposed to fill his place. Before the inconveniencies are incurred which *must* attend all violent revolutions in property through extensive confiscation, we ought to have some rational assurance that the purchasers of the confiscated property will be in a considerable degree more laborious, more virtuous, more sober, less disposed to extort an unreasonable proportion of the gains of the labourer, or to consume on themselves a larger share than is fit for the measure of an individual; or that they should be qualified to dispense the surplus in a more steady and equal mode, so as to answer the purposes of a politic expenditure, than the old possessors, call those possessors bishops, or canons, or commendatory abbots, or monks, or what you please. The monks are lazy. Be it so. Suppose them no otherwise employed than by singing in the choir. They are as usefully employed as those who neither sing nor say. As usefully even as those who sing upon the stage. They are as usefully employed as if they worked from dawn to dark in the innumerable servile, degrading, unseemly, unmanly, and often most unwholesome and pestiferous occupations, to which by the social economy so many wretches are inevitably doomed. If it were not generally pernicious to disturb the natural course of things, and to impede, in any degree, the great wheel of circulation which is turned by the strangely-directed labour of these unhappy people, I should be infinitely more inclined forcibly to rescue them from their miserable industry, than violently to disturb the tranquil repose of monastic quietude. Humanity, and perhaps policy, might better justify me in the one than in the other. It is a subject on which I have often reflected, and never reflected without feeling from it. I am sure that no consideration, except the necessity of submitting to the yoke of luxury, and the despotism of fancy, who in their own imperious way will distribute the surplus product

of the soil, can justify the toleration of such trades and employments in a well-regulated state. But for this purpose of distribution, it seems to me, that the idle expenses of monks are quite as well directed as the idle expenses of us layloiterers.

When the advantages of the possession and of the project are on a par, there is no motive for a change. But in the present case, perhaps, they are not upon a par, and the difference is in favour of the possession. It does not appear to me, that the expenses of those whom you are going to expel, do in fact take a course so directly and so generally leading to vitiate and degrade and render miserable those through whom they pass, as the expenses of those favourites whom you are intruding into their houses. Why should the expenditure of a great landed property, which is a dispersion of the surplus product of the soil, appear intolerable to you or to me, when it takes its course through the accumulation of vast libraries, which are the history of the force and weakness of the human mind; through great collections of ancient records, medals, and coins, which attest and explain laws and customs; through paintings and statues, that, by imitating nature, seem to extend the limits of creation; through grand monuments of the dead, which continue the regards and connexions of life beyond the grave; through collections of the specimens of nature, which become a representative assembly of all the classes and families of the world, that by disposition facilitate, and, by exciting curiosity, open the avenues to science? If by great permanent establishments, all these objects of expense are better secured from the inconstant sport of personal caprice and personal extravagance, are they worse than if the same tastes prevailed in scattered individuals? Does not the sweat of the mason and carpenter, who toil in order to partake the sweat of the peasant, flow as pleasantly and as salubriously, in the construction and repair of the majestic edifices of religion, as in the painted booths and sordid sties of vice and luxury; as honourably and as profitably in repairing those sacred works, which grow hoary with innumerable years, as on the momentary receptacles of transient voluptuousness; in opera-houses, and brothels, and gaming-houses, and clubhouses, and obelisks in the Champ de Mars? Is the surplus product of the olive and the vine worse employed in the frugal sustenance of persons, whom the fictions of a pious imagination raise to dignity by construing in the service of God, than in pampering the innumerable multitude of those who are degraded by being made useless domestics, subservient to the pride

of man? Are the decorations of temples an expenditure less worthy a wise man, than ribbons, and laces, and national cockades, and petit maisons, and petit soupers, and all the innumerable fopperies and follies, in which opulence sports away the burthen of its superfluity?

We tolerate even these; not from love of them, but for fear of worse. We tolerate them, because property and liberty, to a degree, require that toleration. But why proscribe the other, and surely, in every point of view, the more laudable use of estates? Why, through the violation of all property, through an outrage upon every principle of liberty, forcibly carry them from the better to the worse?

This comparison between the new individuals and the old corps is made upon a supposition that no reform could be made in the latter. But, in a question of reformation, I always consider corporate bodies, whether sole or consisting of many, to be much more susceptible of a public direction by the power of the state, in the use of their property, and in the regulation of modes and habits of life in their members, than private citizens ever can be, or perhaps ought to be: and this seems to me a very material consideration for those who undertake anything which merits the name of a politic enterprise.—So far as to the estates of monasteries.

With regard to the estates possessed by bishops and canons, and commendatory abbots, I cannot find out for what reason some landed estates may not be held otherwise than by inheritance. Can any philosophic spoiler undertake to demonstrate the positive or the comparative evil of having a certain, and that too a large, portion of landed property, passing in succession through persons whose title to it is, always in theory, and often in fact, an eminent degree of piety, morals, and learning; a property, which, by its destination, in their turn, and on the score of merit, gives to the noblest families renovation and support, to the lowest the means of dignity and elevation; a property, the tenure of which is the performance of some duty, (whatever value you may choose to set upon that duty,) and the character of whose proprietors demands, at least, an exterior decorum, and gravity of manners; who are to exercise a generous but temperate hospitality; part of whose income they are to consider as a trust for charity; and who, even when they fail in their trust, when they slide from their character, and degenerate into a mere common secular nobleman or gentleman, are in no respect worse than those who may succeed them in their forfeited possessions? Is it better that estates should be held by those

who have no duty, than by those who have one?—by those whose character and destination point to virtues, than by those who have no rule and direction in the expenditure of their estates but their own will and appetite? Nor are these estates held altogether in the character or with the evils supposed inherent in mortmain. They pass from hand to hand with a more rapid circulation than any other. No excess is good; and therefore too great a proportion of landed property may be held officially for life: but it does not seem to me of material injury to any commonwealth, that there should exist some estates that have a chance of being acquired by other means than the previous acquisition of money.

This letter is grown to a great length, though it is indeed short with regard to the infinite extent of the subject. Various avocations have from time to time called my mind from the subject. I was not sorry to give myself leisure to observe whether, in the proceedings of the National Assembly, I might not find reasons to change or to qualify some of my first sentiments. Everything has confirmed me more strongly in my first opinions. It was my original purpose to take a view of the principles of the National Assembly with regard to the great and fundamental establishments; and to compare the whole of what you have substituted in the place of what you have destroyed, with the several members of our British constitution. But this plan is of a greater extent than at first I computed, and I find that you have little desire to take the advantage of any examples. At present I must content myself with some remarks upon your establishments; reserving for another time what I proposed to say concerning the spirit of our British monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, as practically they exist.

I have taken a view of what has been done by the governing power in France. I have certainly spoke of it with freedom. Those whose principle it is to despise the ancient, permanent sense of mankind, and to set up a scheme of society on new principles, must naturally expect that such of us, who think better of the judgment of the human race than of theirs, should consider both them and their devices, as men and schemes upon their trial. They must take it for granted that we attend much to their reason, but not at all to their authority. They have not one of the great influencing prejudices of mankind in their favour. They avow their hostility to opinion. Of course they must expect no support from that influence, which, with every other authority, they have deposed from the seat of its jurisdiction.

I can never consider this Assembly as anything else than a voluntary association of men, who have availed themselves of circumstances to seize upon the power of the state. They have not the sanction and authority of the character under which they first met.They have assumed another of a very different nature; and have completely altered and inverted all the relations in which they originally stood. They do not hold the authority they exercise under any constitutional law of the state. They have departed from the instructions of the people by whom they were sent; which instructions, as the Assembly did not act in virtue of any ancient usage or settled law, were the sole source of their authority. The most considerable of their acts have not been done by great majorities; and in this sort of near divisions, which carry only the constructive authority of the whole, strangers will consider reasons as well as resolutions.

If they had set up this new, experimental government, as a necessary substitute for an expelled tyranny, mankind would anticipate the time of prescription, which, through long usage, mellows into legality governments that were violent in their commencement. All those who have affections which lead them to the conservation of civil order would recognise, even in its cradle, the child as legitimate, which has been produced from those principles of cogent expediency to which all just governments owe their birth, and on which they justify their continuance. But they will be late and reluctant in giving any sort of countenance to the operations of a power, which has derived its birth from no law and no necessity; but which on the contrary has had its origin in those vices and sinister practices by which the social union is often disturbed and sometimes destroyed. This Assembly has hardly a year's prescription. We have their own word for it that they have made a revolution. To make a revolution is a measure which, *prima fronte,* requires an apology.[87] To make a revolution is to subvert the ancient state of our country; and no common reasons are called for to justify so violent a proceeding. The sense of mankind authorizes us to examine into the mode of acquiring new power, and to criticise on the use that is made of it, with less awe and reverence than that which is usually conceded to a settled and recognised authority.

In obtaining and securing their power, the Assembly proceeds upon principles the most opposite to those which appear to direct them in the use of it. An observation on this difference will let us into the true spirit of their conduct. Everything which they have done, or continue to do, in order to

obtain and keep their power, is by the most common arts. They proceed exactly as their ancestors of ambition have done before them.—Trace them through all their artifices, frauds, and violences, you can find nothing at all that is new. They follow precedents and examples with the punctilious exactness of a pleader. They never depart an iota from the authentic formulas of tyranny and usurpation. But in all the regulations relative to the public good, the spirit has been the very reverse of this. There they commit the whole to the mercy of untried speculations; they abandon the dearest interests of the public to those loose theories, to which none of them would choose to trust the slightest of his private concerns. They make this difference, because in their desire of obtaining and securing power they are thoroughly in earnest; there they travel in the beaten road.

87. *prima fronte:* on the face of it

The public interests, because about them they have no real solicitude, they abandon wholly to chance: I say to chance, because their schemes have nothing in experience to prove their tendency beneficial.

We must always see with a pity not unmixed with respect, the errors of those who are timid and doubtful of themselves with regard to points wherein the happiness of mankind is concerned. But in these gentlemen there is nothing of the tender, parental solicitude, which fears to cut up the infant for the sake of an experiment. In the vastness of their promises, and the confidence of their predictions, they far outdo all the boasting of empirics. The arrogance of their pretensions, in a manner provokes and challenges us to an inquiry into their foundation.

I am convinced that there are men of considerable parts among the popular leaders in the National Assembly. Some of them display eloquence in their speeches and their writings. This cannot be without powerful and cultivated talents. But eloquence may exist without a proportionable degree of wisdom. When I speak of ability, I am obliged to distinguish. What they have done towards the support of their system bespeaks no ordinary men. In the system itself, taken as the scheme of a republic constructed for procuring the prosperity and security of the citizen, and for promoting the strength and grandeur of the state, I confess myself unable to find out anything which displays, in a single instance, the work of a comprehensive and disposing mind, or even the provisions of a vulgar prudence. Their

purpose everywhere seems to have been to evade and slip aside from *difficulty.* This it has been the glory of the great masters in all the arts to confront, and to overcome; and when they had overcome the first difficulty, to turn it into an instrument for new conquests over new difficulties; thus to enable them to extend the empire of their science; and even to push forward, beyond the reach of their original thoughts, the land-marks of the human understanding itself. Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by the supreme ordinance of a parental Guardian and Legislator, who knows us better than we know ourselves, as he loves us better too. *Pater ipse colendi haud facilem esse viam voluit.*[88] He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves, and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object, and compels us to consider it in all its relations. It will not suffer us to be superficial. It is the want of nerves of understanding for such a task, it is the degenerate fondness for tricking short-cuts, and little fallacious facilities, that has in so many parts of the world created governments with arbitrary powers.

88. "The great Father, [Jove] himself has willed that the path of husbandry should not be smooth." Virgil, *Georgics,* I, 12089.

They have created the late arbitrary monarchy of France. They have created the arbitrary republic of Paris. With them defects in wisdom are to be supplied by the plenitude of force. They get nothing by it. Commencing their labours on a principle of sloth, they have the common fortune of slothful men. The difficulties, which they rather had eluded than escaped, meet them again in their course; they multiply and thicken on them; they are involved, through a labyrinth of confused detail, in an industry without limit, and without direction; and, in conclusion, the whole of their work becomes feeble, vicious, and insecure.

It is this inability to wrestle with difficulty which has obliged the arbitrary Assembly of France to commence their schemes of reform with abolition and total destruction.[89] But is it in destroying and pulling down that skill is displayed? Your mob can do this as well at least as your assemblies. The shallowest understanding, the rudest hand, is more than equal to that task. Rage and phrensy will pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years.

The errors and defects of old establishments are visible and palpable. It calls for little ability to point them out; and where absolute power is given, it requires but a word wholly to abolish the vice and the establishment together. The same lazy but restless disposition, which loves sloth and hates quiet, directs the politicians, when they come to work for supplying the place of what they have destroyed.

89. * A leading member of the Assembly, M. Rabaud de St. Etienne, has expressed the principle of all their proceedings as clearly as possible—Nothing can be more simple: "Tous les établissemens [*sic*] en France couronnent le malheur du peuple: pour le rendre heureux il faut le rénouveler; changer ses idées; changer ses loix; changer ses moeurs; . . . changer les hommes; changer les choses; changer les mots . . . tout détruire; oui, tout détruire; puisque tout est à recréer."

[All establishments in France crown the unhappiness of the people: to render them happy it is necessary to renew them; to change their ideas, to change their laws; to change their manners; . . to change men, to change things; to change words . . . to destroy everything; yes, to destroy everything; since everything is to be re-created." (Frank M. Turner, trans.)]

This gentleman was chosen president in an assembly not sitting at the *Quinze-vingt*, or the *Petits Maisons;* and composed of persons giving themselves out to be rational beings; but neither his ideas, language, or conduct, differ in the smallest degree from the discourses, opinions, and actions of those within and without the Assembly, who direct the operations of the machine now at work in France.

To make everything the reverse of what they have seen is quite as easy as to destroy. No difficulties occur in what has never been tried. Criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed; and eager enthusiasm and cheating hope have all the wide field of imagination, in which they may expatiate with little or no opposition.

At once to preserve and to reform is quite another thing. When the useful parts of an old establishment are kept, and what is superadded is to be fitted to what is retained, a vigorous mind, steady, persevering attention, various powers of comparison and combination, and the resources of an understanding fruitful in expedients, are to be exercised; they are to be exercised in a continued conflict with the combined force of opposite vices, with the obstinacy that rejects all improvement, and the levity that is fatigued and disgusted with everything of which it is in possession. But you may object—"A process of this kind is slow. It is not fit for an assembly, which glories in performing in a few months the work of ages. Such a mode of reforming, possibly, might take up many years." Without question it might; and it ought. It is one of the excellencies of a method in which time is amongst the assistants, that its operation is slow, and in some cases almost imperceptible. If circumspection and caution are a part of wisdom,

when we work only upon inanimate matter, surely they become a part of duty too, when the subject of our demolition and construction is not brick and timber, but sentient beings, by the sudden alteration of whose state, condition, and habits, multitudes may be rendered miserable. But it seems as if it were the prevalent opinion in Paris, that an unfeeling heart, and an undoubting confidence, are the sole qualifications for a perfect legislator. Far different are my ideas of that high office. The true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility. He ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself. It may be allowed to his temperament to catch his ultimate object with an intuitive glance; but his movements towards it ought to be deliberate. Political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means. There mind must conspire with mind. Time is required to produce that union of minds which alone can produce all the good we aim at. Our patience will achieve more than our force. If I might venture to appeal to what is so much out of fashion in Paris, I mean to experience, I should tell you, that in my course I have known, and, according to my measure, have co-operated with great men; and I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business. By a slow but well-sustained progress, the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first gives light to us in the second; and so, from light to light, we are conducted with safety through the whole series. We see that the parts or the system do not clash. The evils latent in the most promising contrivances are provided for as they arise. One advantage is as little as possible sacrificed to another. We compensate, we reconcile, we balance. We are enabled to unite into a consistent whole the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men. From hence arises, not an excellence in simplicity, but one far superior, an excellence in composition. Where the great interests of mankind are concerned through a long succession of generations, that succession ought to be admitted into some share in the councils which are so deeply to affect them. If justice requires this, the work itself requires the aid of more minds than one age can furnish. It is from this view of things that the best legislators have been often satisfied with the establishment of some sure, solid, and ruling principle in government; a power like that which some of the philosophers have called a plastic nature; and having fixed the principle, they have left it afterwards to its own operation.

To proceed in this manner, that is, to proceed with a presiding principle, and a prolific energy, is with me the criterion of profound wisdom. What your politicians think the marks of a bold, hardy genius, are only proofs of a deplorable want of ability. By their violent haste and their defiance of the process of nature, they are delivered over blindly to every projector and adventurer, to every alchymist and empiric. They despair of turning to account anything that is common. Diet is nothing in their system of remedy. The worst of it is, that this their despair of curing common distempers by regular methods, arises not only from defect of comprehension, but, I fear, from some malignity of disposition. Your legislators seem to have taken their opinions of all professions, ranks, and offices, from the declamations and buffooneries of satirists; who would themselves be astonished if they were held to the letter of their own descriptions. By listening only to these, your leaders regard all things only on the side of their vices and faults, and view those vices and faults under every colour of exaggeration. It is undoubtedly true, though it may seem paradoxical; but in general, those who are habitually employed in finding and displaying faults, are unqualified for the work of reformation: because their minds are not only unfurnished with patterns of the fair and good, but by habit they come to take no delight in the contemplation of those things. By hating vices too much, they come to love men too little. It is therefore not wonderful, that they should be indisposed and unable to serve them. From hence arises the complexional disposition of some of your guides to pull everything in pieces. At this malicious game they display the whole of their *quadrimanous* activity.[90] As to the rest, the paradoxes of eloquent writers, brought forth purely as a sport of fancy, to try their talents, to rouse attention and excite surprise, are taken up by these gentlemen, not in the spirit of the original authors, as means of cultivating their taste and improving their style. These paradoxes become with them serious grounds of action, upon which they proceed in regulating the most important concerns of the state. Cicero ludicrously describes Cato as endeavouring to act, in the commonwealth, upon the school paradoxes, which exercised the wits of the junior students in the Stoic philosophy. If this was true of Cato, these gentlemen copy after him in the manner of some persons who lived about his time—*pede nudo Catonem.*[91] Mr. Hume told me that he had from Rousseau himself the secret of his principles of composition. That acute though eccentric observer had perceived, that to strike and interest the

public, the marvellous must be produced; that the marvellous of the heathen mythology had long since lost its effects; that giants, magicians, fairies, and heroes of romance which succeeded, had exhausted the portion of credulity which belonged to their age; that now nothing was left to the writer but that species of the marvellous which might still be produced, and with as great an effect as ever, though in another way; that is, the marvellous in life, in manners, in characters, and in extraordinary situations, giving rise to new and unlooked-for strokes in politics and morals. I believe, that were Rousseau alive, and in one of his lucid intervals, he would be shocked at the practical phrensy of his scholars, who in their paradoxes are servile imitators, and even in their incredulity discover an implicit faith.

Men who undertake considerable things, even in a regular way, ought to give us ground to presume ability. But the physician of the state, who, not satisfied with the cure of distempers, undertakes to regenerate constitutions, ought to show uncommon powers. Some very unusual appearances of wisdom ought to display themselves on the face of the designs of those, who appeal to no practice, and who copy after no model. Has any such been manifested? I shall take a view (it shall for the subject be a very short one) of what the Assembly has done, with regard, first, to the constitution of the legislature; in the next place, to that of the executive power; then to that of the judicature; afterwards to the model of the army; and conclude with the system of finance; to see whether we can discover in any part of their schemes the portentous ability, which may justify these bold undertakers in the superiority which they assume over mankind.

90. *quadrimanous*: four-handed or monkeylike
91. . . . if with naked feet and savage air,
Cato's short coat some mimic coxcomb wear.

Horace, *Epistles,* I, 19, 12–13, in *Poetical Translation,* 4: 169.

It is in the model of the sovereign and presiding part of this new republic, that we should expect their grand display. Here they were to prove their title to their proud demands. For the plan itself at large, and for the reasons on which it is grounded, I refer to the journals of the Assembly of the 29th of September, 1789, and to the subsequent proceedings which have made any alterations in the plan. So far as in a matter somewhat confused I can see light, the system remains substantially as it has been originally

framed. My few remarks will be such as regard its spirit, its tendency, and its fitness for framing a popular commonwealth, which they profess theirs to be, suited to the ends for which any commonwealth, and particularly such a commonwealth, is made. At the same time, I mean to consider its consistency with itself and its own principles.

Old establishments are tried by their effects. If the people are happy, united, wealthy, and powerful, we presume the rest. We conclude that to be good from whence good is derived. In old establishments various correctives have been found for their aberrations from theory. Indeed they are the results of various necessities and expediences. They are not often constructed after any theory; theories are rather drawn from them. In them we often see the end best obtained, where the means seem not perfectly reconcilable to what we may fancy was the original scheme. The means taught by experience may be better suited to political ends than those contrived in the original project. They again react upon the primitive constitution, and sometimes improve the design itself, from which they seem to have departed. I think all this might be curiously exemplified in the British Constitution. At worst, the errors and deviations of every kind in reckoning are found and computed, and the ship proceeds in her course. This is the case of old establishments; but in a new and merely theoretic system, it is expected that every contrivance shall appear, on the face of it, to answer its ends; especially where the projectors are no way embarrassed with an endeavour to accommodate the new building to an old one, either in the walls or on the foundations.

The French builders, clearing away as mere rubbish whatever they found, and, like their ornamental gardeners, forming everything into an exact level, propose to rest the whole local and general legislature on three bases of three different kinds; one geometrical, one arithmetical, and the third financial; the first of which they call the *basis of territory;* the second, the *basis of population;* and the third, the *basis of contribution.* For the accomplishment of the first of these purposes, they divide the area of their country into eighty-three pieces, regularly square, of eighteen leagues by eighteen. These large divisions are called *Departments.* These they portion, proceeding by square measurement, into seventeen hundred and twenty districts, called *Communes.* These again they subdivide, still proceeding by square measurement, into smaller districts called *Cantons,* making in all 6400.

At first view this geometrical basis of theirs presents not much to admire or to blame. It calls for no great legislative talents. Nothing more than an accurate land surveyor, with his chain, sight, and theodolite, is requisite for such a plan as this. In the old divisions of the country, various accidents at various times, and the ebb and flow of various properties and jurisdictions, settled their bounds. These bounds were not made upon any fixed system undoubtedly. They were subject to some inconveniences: but they were inconveniences for which use had found remedies, and habit had supplied accommodation and patience. In this new pavement of square within square, and this organization, and semi-organization, made on the system of Empedocles and Buffon, and not upon any politic principle, it is impossible that innumerable local inconveniences, to which men are not habituated, must not arise. But these I pass over, because it requires an accurate knowledge of the country, which I do not possess, to specify them.

When these state surveyors came to take a view of their work of measurement, they soon found, that in politics the most fallacious of all things was geometrical demonstration. They had then recourse to another basis (or rather buttress) to support the building, which tottered on that false foundation. It was evident, that the goodness of the soil, the number of the people, their wealth, and the largeness of their contributon, made such infinite variations between square and square, as to render mensuration a ridiculous standard of power in the commonwealth, and equality in geometry the most unequal of all measures in the distribution of men. However, they could not give it up. But dividing their political and civil representation into three parts, they allotted one of those parts to the square measurement, without a single fact or calculation to ascertain whether this territorial proportion of representation was fairly assigned, and ought upon any principle really to be a third. Having however given to geometry this portion (of a third for her dower) out of compliment, I suppose, to that sublime science, they left the other two to be scuffled for between the other parts, population and contribution.

When they came to provide for population, they were not able to proceed quite so smoothly as they had done in the field of their geometry. Here their arithmetic came to bear upon their juridical metaphysics. Had they stuck to their metaphysic principles, the arithmetical process would be simple indeed. Men, with them, are strictly equal, and are entitled to equal rights in their own government. Each head, on this system, would have its

vote, and every man would vote directly for the person who was to represent him in the legislature. "But soft—by regular degrees, not yet."[92] This metaphysic principle, to which law, custom, usage, policy, reason, were to yield, is to yield itself to their pleasure. There must be many degrees, and some stages, before the representative can come in contact with his constituent. Indeed, as we shall soon see, these two persons are to have no sort of communion with each other. First, the voters in the *Canton,* who compose what they call *primary assemblies,* are to have a *qualification.* What! a qualification on the indefeasible rights of men? Yes; but it shall be a very small qualification. Our injustice shall be very little oppressive; only the local valuation of three days' labour paid to the public. Why, this is not much, I readily admit, for anything but the utter subversion of your equalising principle. As a qualification it might as well be let alone; for it answers no one purpose for which qualifications are established; and, on your ideas, it excludes from a vote the man of all others whose natural equality stands the most in need of protection and defence: I mean the man who has nothing else but his natural equality to guard him. You order him to buy the right, which you before told him nature had given to him gratuitously at his birth, and of which no authority on earth could lawfully deprive him. With regard to the person who cannot come up to your market, a tyrannous aristocracy, as against him, is established at the very outset, by you who pretend to be its sworn foe.

The gradation proceeds. These primary assemblies of the *Canton* elect deputies to the *Commune;* one for every two hundred qualified inhabitants. Here is the first medium put between the primary elector and the representative legislator; and here a new turnpike is fixed for taxing the rights of men with a second qualification: for none can be elected into the *Commune* who does not pay the amount of ten days' labour. Nor have we yet done. There is still to be another gradation.[93] These *Communes,* chosen by the *Canton,* choose to the *Department;* and the deputies of the *Department* choose their deputies to the *National Assembly.*

92. Alexander Pope, *Moral Essays,* 4: 129.

93. * The Assembly, in executing the plan of their committee, made some alterations. They have struck out one stage in these gradations; this removes a part of the objection; but the main objection, namely, that in their scheme the first constituent voter has no connection with the representative legislator, remains in all its force. There are other alterations, some possibly for the better, some certainly for the worse; but to the author the merit or demerit of these smaller alterations appears to be of no moment, where the scheme itself is fundamentally vicious and absurd.

Here is a third barrier of a senseless qualification. Every deputy to the National Assembly must pay, in direct contribution, to the value of a *mark of silver.* Of all these qualifying barriers we must think alike; that they are impotent to secure independence; strong only to destroy the rights of men.

In all this process, which in its fundamental elements affects to consider only *population* upon a principle of natural right, there is a manifest attention to *property;* which, however just and reasonable on other schemes, is on theirs perfectly unsupportable.

When they come to their third basis, that of *Contribution,* we find that they have more completely lost sight of their rights of men. This last basis rests *entirely* on property. A principle totally different from the equality of men, and utterly irreconcilable to it, is thereby admitted; but no sooner is this principle admitted, than (as usual) it is subverted; and it is not subverted (as we shall presently see) to approximate the inequality of riches to the level of nature. The additional share in the third portion of representation (a portion reserved exclusively for the higher contribution) is made to regard the *district* only, and not the individuals in it who pay. It is easy to perceive, by the course of their reasonings, how much they were embarrassed by their contradictory ideas of the rights of men and the privileges of riches. The committee of constitution do as good as admit that they are wholly irreconcilable. "The relation with regard to the contributions, is without doubt *null* (say they) when the question is on the balance of the political rights as between individual and individual; without which *personal equality would be destroyed,* and *an aristocracy of the rich* would be established. But this inconvenience entirely disappears when the proportional relation of the contribution is only considered in the *great masses,* and is solely between province and province; it serves in that case only to form a just reciprocal proportion between the cities, without affecting the personal rights of the citizens."

Here the principle of *contribution,* as taken between man and man, is reprobated as *null,* and destructive to equality; and as pernicious too; because it leads to the establishment of an *aristocracy of the rich.* However, it must not be abandoned. And the way of getting rid of the difficulty is to establish the inequality as between department and department, leaving all the individuals in each department upon an exact par. Observe, that this parity between individuals had been before destroyed, when the qualifications within the departments were settled; nor does it seem a matter

of great importance whether the equality of men be injured by masses or individually. An individual is not of the same importance in a mass represented by a few, as in a mass represented by many. It would be too much to tell a man jealous of his equality, that the elector has the same franchise who votes for three members as he who votes for ten.

Now take it in the other point of view, and let us suppose their principle of representation according to contribution, that is, according to riches, to be well imagined, and to be a necessary basis for their republic. In this their third basis they assume, that riches ought to be respected, and that justice and policy require that they should entitle men, in some mode or other, to a larger share in the administration of public affairs; it is now to be seen how the Assembly provides for the pre-eminence, or even for the security, of the rich, by conferring, in virtue of their opulence, that larger measure of power to their district which is denied to them personally. I readily admit (indeed I should lay it down as a fundamental principle) that in a republican government, which has a democratic basis, the rich do require an additional security above what is necessary to them in monarchies. They are subject to envy, and through envy to oppression. On the present scheme it is impossible to divine what advantage they derive from the aristocratic preference upon which the unequal representation of the masses is founded. The rich cannot feel it, either as a support to dignity, or as security to fortune: for the aristocratic mass is generated from purely democratic principles; and the preference given to it in the general representation has no sort of reference to, or connexion with, the persons, upon account of whose property this superiority of the mass is established. If the contrivers of this scheme meant any sort of favour to the rich, in consequence of their contribution, they ought to have conferred the privilege either on the individual rich, or on some class formed of rich persons (as historians represent Servius Tullius to have done in the early constitution of Rome); because the contest between the rich and the poor is not a struggle between corporation and corporation, but a contest between men and men; a competition not between districts, but between descriptions. It would answer its purpose better if the scheme were inverted; that the votes of the masses were rendered equal; and that the votes within each mass were proportioned to property.

Let us suppose one man in a district (it is an easy supposition) to contribute as much as an hundred of his neighbours. Against these he has

but one vote. If there were but one representative for the mass, his poor neighbours would outvote him by an hundred to one for that single representative. Bad enough. But amends are to be made him. How? The district, in virtue of his wealth, is to choose, say ten members instead of one: that is to say, by paying a very large contribution he has the happiness of being outvoted, an hundred to one, by the poor, for ten representatives, instead of being outvoted exactly in the same proportion for a single member. In truth, instead of benefiting by this superior quantity of representation, the rich man is subjected to an additional hardship. The increase of representation within his province sets up nine persons more, and as many more than nine as there may be democratic candidates, to cabal and intrigue, and to flatter the people at his expense and to his oppression. An interest is by this means held out to multitudes of the inferior sort, in obtaining a salary of eighteen livres a day, (to them a vast object,) besides the pleasure of a residence in Paris, and their share in the government of the kingdom. The more the objects of ambition are multiplied and become democratic, just in that proportion the rich are endangered.

Thus it must fare between the poor and the rich in the province deemed aristocratic, which in its internal relation is the very reverse of that character. In its external relation, that is, its relation to the other provinces, I cannot see how the unequal representation, which is given to masses on account of wealth, becomes the means of preserving the equipoise and the tranquillity of the commonwealth. For if it be one of the objects to secure the weak from being crushed by the strong, (as in all society undoubtedly it is,) how are the smaller and poorer of these masses to be saved from the tyranny of the more wealthy? Is it by adding to the wealthy further and more systematical means of oppressing them? When we come to a balance of representation between corporate bodies, provincial interests, emulations, and jealousies are full as likely to arise among them as among individuals; and their divisions are likely to produce a much hotter spirit of dissension, and something leading much more nearly to a war.

I see that these aristocratic masses are made upon what is called the principle of direct contribution. Nothing can be a more unequal standard than this. The indirect contribution, that which arises from duties on consumption, is in truth a better standard, and follows and discovers wealth more naturally than this of direct contribution. It is difficult indeed to fix a

standard of local preference on account of the one, or of the other, or of both, because some provinces may pay the more of either or of both, on account of causes not intrinsic, but originating from those very districts over whom they have obtained a preference in consequence of their ostensible contribution. If the masses were independent, sovereign bodies, who were to provide for a federative treasury by distinct contingents, and that the revenue had not (as it has) many impositions running through the whole, which affect men individually, and not corporately, and which, by their nature, confound all territorial limits, something might be said for the basis of contribution as founded on masses. But of all things, this representation, to be measured by contribution, is the most difficult to settle upon principles of equity in a country, which considers its districts as members of a whole. For a great city, such as Bourdeaux, or Paris, appears to pay a vast body of duties, almost out of all assignable proportion to other places, and its mass is considered accordingly. But are these cities the true contributors in that proportion? No. The consumers of the commodities imported into Bourdeaux, who are scattered through all France, pay the import duties of Bourdeaux. The produce of the vintage in Guienne and Languedoc give to that city the means of its contribution growing out of an export commerce. The landholders who spend their estates in Paris, and are thereby the creators of that city, contribute for Paris from the provinces out of which their revenues arise. Very nearly the same arguments will apply to the representative share given on account of *direct* contribution: because the direct contribution must be assessed on wealth real or presumed; and that local wealth will itself arise from causes not local, and which therefore in equity ought not to produce a local preference.

It is very remarkable, that in this fundamental regulation, which settles the representation of the mass upon the direct contribution, they have not yet settled how that direct contribution shall be laid, and how apportioned. Perhaps there is some latent policy towards the continuance of the present Assembly in this strange procedure. However, until they do this, they can have no certain constitution. It must depend at last upon the system of taxation, and must vary with every variation in that system. As they have contrived matters, their taxation does not so much depend on their constitution, as their constitution on their taxation. This must introduce great confusion among the masses; as the variable qualification for votes

within the district must, if ever real contested elections take place, cause infinite internal controversies.

To compare together the three bases, not on their political reason, but on the ideas on which the Assembly works, and to try its consistency with itself, we cannot avoid observing, that the principle which the committeee call the basis of *population,* does not begin to operate from the same point with the two other principles called the bases of *territory* and of *contribution,* which are both of an aristocratic nature. The consequence is, that, where all three begin to operate together, there is the most absurd inequality produced by the operation of the former on the two latter principles. Every canton contains four square leagues, and is estimated to contain, on the average, 4000 inhabitants, or 680 voters in the *primary assemblies,* which vary in numbers with the population of the canton, and send *one deputy* to the *commune* for every 200 voters. *Nine cantons* make a *commune.*

Now let us take a *canton* containing *a sea-port town of trade,* or *a great manufacturing town.* Let us suppose the population of this canton to be 12,700 inhabitants, or 2193 voters, forming *three primary assemblies,* and sending *ten deputies* to the *commune.*

Oppose to this *one* canton *two* others of the remaining eight of the same commune. These we may suppose to have their fair population of 4000 inhabitants and 680 voters each, or 8000 inhabitants and 1360 voters, both together. These will form only *two primary assemblies,* and send only *six* deputies to the *commune.*

When the assembly of the *commune* comes to vote on the *basis of territory,* which principle is first admitted to operate in that assembly, the *single canton,* which has *half* the territory of the *other two,* will have *ten* voices to *six* in the election of *three deputies* to the assembly of the department, chosen on the express ground of a representation of territory. This inequality, striking as it is, will be yet highly aggravated, if we suppose, as we fairly may, the *several* other cantons of the *commune* to fall proportionably short of the average population, as much as the *principal canton* exceeds it.

Now as to *the basis of contribution,* which also is a principle admitted first to operate in the assembly of the *commune.* Let us again take *one* canton, such as is stated above. If the whole of the direct contributions paid by a great trading or manufacturing town be divided equally among the

inhabitants, each individual will be found to pay much more than an individual living in the country according to the same average. The whole paid by the inhabitants of the former will be more than the whole paid by the inhabitants of the latter—we may fairly assume one-third more. Then the 12,700 inhabitants, or 2193 voters of the canton, will pay as much as 19,050 inhabitants, or 3289 voters of the *other cantons,* which are nearly the estimated proportion of inhabitants and voters of *five* other cantons. Now the 2193 voters will, as I before said, send only *ten* deputies to the assembly; the 3289 voters will send *sixteen.* Thus, for an *equal* share in the contribution of the whole *commune,* there will be a difference of *sixteen* voices to *ten* in voting for deputies to be chosen on the principle of representing the general contribution of the whole *commune.*

By the same mode of computation we shall find 15,875 inhabitants, or 2741 voters of the *other* cantons, who pay *one-sixth* LESS to the contribution of the whole *commune,* will have *three* voices MORE than the 12,700 inhabitants, or 2193 voters of the *one* canton.

Such is the fantastical and unjust inequality between mass and mass, in this curious repartition of the rights of representation arising out of *territory* and *contribution.* The qualifications which these confer are in truth negative qualifications, that give a right in an inverse proportion to the possession of them.

In this whole contrivance of the three bases, consider it in any light you please, I do not see a variety of objects reconciled in one consistent whole, but several contradictory principles reluctantly and irreconcilably brought and held together by your philosophers, like wild beasts shut up in a cage, to claw and bite each other to their mutual destruction.

I am afraid I have gone too far into their way of considering the formation of a constitution. They have much, but bad, metaphysics; much, but bad, geometry; much, but false, proportionate arithmetic; but if it were all as exact as metaphysics, geometry, and arithmetic ought to be, and if their schemes were perfectly consistent in all their parts, it would make only a more fair and sightly vision. It is remarkable, that, in a great arrangement of mankind, not one reference whatsoever is to be found to anything moral or anything politic; nothing that relates to the concerns, the actions, the passions, the interests of men. *Hominem non sapiunt.*[94]

You see I only consider this constitution as electoral, and leading by steps to the National Assembly. I do not enter into the internal government

of the departments, and their genealogy through the communes and cantons. These local governments are, in the original plan, to be as nearly as possible composed in the same manner and on the same principles with the elective assemblies. They are each of them bodies perfectly compact and rounded in themselves.

You cannot but perceive in this scheme, that it has a direct and immediate tendency to sever France into a variety of republics, and to render them totally independent of each other, without any direct constitutional means of coherence, connexion, or subordination, except what may be derived from their acquiescence in the determinations of the general congress of the ambassadors from each independent republic. Such in reality is the National Assembly, and such governments I admit do exist in the world, though in forms infinitely more suitable to the local and habitual circumstances of their people.

94. *Hominem non sapiunt*: "They do not know mankind." Martial, X.4.10.

But such associations, rather than bodies politic, have generally been the effect of necessity, not choice; and I believe the present French power is the very first body of citizens, who, having obtained full authority to do with their country what they pleased, have chosen to dissever it in this barbarous manner.

It is impossible not to observe, that, in the spirit of this geometrical distribution, and arithmetical arrangement, these pretended citizens treat France exactly like a country of conquest. Acting as conquerors, they have imitated the policy of the harshest of that harsh race. The policy of such barbarous victors, who contemn a subdued people, and insult their feelings, has ever been, as much as in them lay, to destroy all vestiges of the ancient country, in religion, in polity, in laws, and in manners; to confound all territorial limits; to produce a general poverty; to put up their properties to auction; to crush their princes, nobles, and pontiffs; to lay low everything which had lifted its head above the level, or which could serve to combine or rally, in their distresses, the disbanded people, under the standard of old opinion. They have made France free in the manner in which those sincere friends to the rights of mankind, the Romans, freed Greece, Macedon, and other nations. They destroyed the bonds of their union, under colour of providing for the independence of each of their cities.

When the members who compose these new bodies of cantons, communes, and departments, arrangements purposely produced through the medium of confusion, begin to act, they will find themselves in a great measure strangers to one another. The electors and elected throughout, especially in the rural *cantons,* will be frequently without any civil habitudes or connexions, or any of that natural discipline which is the soul of a true republic. Magistrates and collectors of revenue are now no longer acquainted with their districts, bishops with their dioceses, or curates with their parishes. These new colonies of the rights of men bear a strong resemblance to that sort of military colonies which Tacitus has observed upon in the declining policy of Rome. In better and wiser days (whatever course they took with foreign nations) they were careful to make the elements of methodical subordination and settlement to be coeval; and even to lay the foundations of civil discipline in the military.[95]

95. * Non, ut olim, universae legiones deducebantur cum tribunis, et centurionibus, et sui cujusque ordinis militibus, ut consensu et caritate rempublicam afficerent; sed ignoti inter se, diversis manipulis, sine rectore, sine affectibus mutuis, quasi ex alio genere mortalium, repente in unum collecti, numerus magis quam colonia. Tac. Annal. 1. 14, sect. 27. All this will be still more applicable to the unconnected, rotatory, biennial national assemblies, in this absurd and senseless constitution.

["For whole legions were no longer transplanted, as in former days, with tribunes and

But, when all the good arts had fallen into ruin, they proceeded, as your Assembly does, upon the equality of men, and with as little judgment, and as little care for those things which make a republic tolerable or durable. But in this, as well as almost every instance, your new commonwealth is born, and bred, and fed, in those corruptions which mark degenerated and worn-out republics. Your child comes into the world with the symptoms of death; the *facies Hippocratica* forms the character of its physiognomy, and the prognostic of its fate.[96]

The legislators who framed the ancient republics knew that their business was too arduous to be accomplished with no better apparatus than the metaphysics of an undergraduate, and the mathematics and arithmetic of an exciseman. They had to do with men, and they were obliged to study human nature. They had to do with citizens, and they were obliged to study the effects of those habits which are communicated by the circumstances of civil life. They were sensible that the operation of this second nature on the first produced a new combination; and thence arose many diversities

amongst men, according to their birth, their education, their professions, the periods of their lives, their residence in towns or in the country, their several ways of acquiring and of fixing property, and according to the quality of the property itself, all which rendered them as it were so many different species of animals. From hence they thought themselves obliged to dispose their citizens into such classes, and to place them in such situations in the state, as their peculiar habits might qualify them to fill, and to allot to them such appropriated privileges as might secure to them what their specific occasions required, and which might furnish to each description such force as might protect it in the conflict caused by the diversity of interests, that must exist, and must contend, in all complex society: for the legislator would have been ashamed, that the coarse husbandman should well know how to assort and to use his sheep, horses, and oxen, and should have enough of common sense, not to abstract and equalize them all into animals, without providing for each kind an appropriate food, care, and employment; whilst he, the economist, disposer, and shepherd of his own kindred, subliming himself into an airy metaphysician, was resolved to know nothing of his flocks but as men in general.

centurions and soldiers of every grade, so as to form a state by their unity and mutual attachment, but strangers to one another from different companies, without a head or any community of sentiment, were suddenly gathered together, as it might be out of any other class of human beings, and became a mere crowd rather than a colony." Tacitus, *The Annals,* Book 14, sec. 27. The *Complete Works of Tacitus,* Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1942), 336.]

96. *facies Hippocratica*: a Hippocratic face, the term used by Hippocrates to indicate the face of a person near death

It is for this reason that Montesquieu observed very justly, that in their classification of the citizens, the great legislators of antiquity made the greatest display of their powers, and even soared above themselves. It is here that your modern legislators have gone deep into the negative series, and sunk even below their own nothing. As the first sort of legislators attended to the different kinds of citizens, and combined them into one commonwealth, the others, the metaphysical and alchemistical legislators, have taken the direct contrary course. They have attempted to confound all sorts of citizens, as well as they could, into one homogeneous mass; and then they divided this their amalgama into a number of incoherent republics. They reduce men to loose counters, merely for the sake of simple

telling, and not to figures whose power is to arise from their place in the table. The elements of their own metaphysics might have taught them better lessons. The troll of their categorical table might have informed them that there was something else in the intellectual world besides *substance* and *quantity.* They might learn from the catechism of metaphysics that there were eight heads more, in every complex deliberation, which they have never thought of; though these, of all the ten, are the subjects on which the skill of man can operate anything at all.[97]

So far from this able disposition of some of the old republican legislators, which follows with a solicitous accuracy the moral conditions and propensities of men, they have levelled and crushed together all the orders which they found, even under the coarse unartificial arrangement of the monarchy, in which mode of government the classing of the citizens is not of so much importance as in a republic. It is true, however, that every such classification, if properly ordered, is good in all forms of government; and composes a strong barrier against the excesses of despotism, as well as it is the necessary means of giving effect and permanence to a republic. For want of something of this kind, if the present project of a republic should fail, all securities to a moderated freedom fail along with it; all the indirect restraints which mitigate despotism are removed; insomuch that if monarchy should ever again obtain an entire ascendency in France, under this or under any other dynasty, it will probably be, if not voluntarily tempered, at setting out, by the wise and virtuous counsels of the prince, the most completely arbitrary power that has ever appeared on earth.

97. * Qualitas, Relatio, Actio, Passio, Ubi, Quando, Situs, Habitus [Quality, relation, action, passion, place, time, situation, condition. These terms constitute categories in the philosophy of Aristotle.]

This is to play a most desperate game.

The confusion which attends on all such proceedings, they even declare to be one of their objects, and they hope to secure their constitution by a terror of a return of those evils which attended their making it. “By this,” say they, “its destruction will become difficult to authority, which cannot break it up without the entire disorganization of the whole state.” They presume, that if this authority should ever come to the same degree of power that they have acquired, it would make a more moderate and chastised use of it, and would piously tremble entirely to disorganize the

state in the savage manner that they have done. They expect, from the virtues of returning despotism, the security which is to be enjoyed by the offspring of their popular vices.

I wish, Sir, that you and my readers would give an attentive perusal to the work of M. de Calonne, on this subject. It is indeed not only an eloquent, but an able and instructive, performance. I confine myself to what he says relative to the constitution of the new state, and to the condition of the revenue. As to the disputes of this minister with his rivals, I do not wish to pronounce upon them. As little do I mean to hazard any opinion concerning his ways and means, financial or political, for taking his country out of its present disgraceful and deplorable situation of servitude, anarchy, bankruptcy, and beggary. I cannot speculate quite so sanguinely as he does: but he is a Frenchman, and has a closer duty relative to those objects, and better means of judging of them, than I can have. I wish that the formal avowal which he refers to, made by one of the principal leaders in the Assembly, concerning the tendency of their scheme to bring France not only from a monarchy to a republic, but from a republic to a mere confederacy, may be very particularly attended to. It adds new force to my observations: and indeed M. de Calonne's work supplies my deficiencies by many new and striking arguments on most of the subjects of this letter.[98]

It is this resolution, to break their country into separate republics, which has driven them into the greatest number of their difficulties and contradictions. If it were not for this, all the questions of exact equality, and these balances, never to be settled, of individual rights, population, and contribution, would be wholly useless. The representation, though derived from parts, would be a duty which equally regarded the whole. Each deputy to the Assembly would be the representative of France, and of all its descriptions, of the many and of the few, of the rich and of the poor, of the great districts and of the small.

98. * See l'Etat de la France, p. 363.

All these districts would themselves be subordinate to some standing authority, existing independently of them, an authority in which their representation, and everything that belongs to it, originated, and to which it was pointed. This standing, unalterable, fundamental government would make, and it is the only thing which could make, that territory truly and

properly a whole. With us, when we elect popular representatives, we send them to a council, in which each man individually is a subject, and submitted to a government complete in all its ordinary functions. With you the elective Assembly is the sovereign, and the sole sovereign; all the members are therefore integral parts of this sole sovereignty. But with us it is totally different. With us the representative, separated from the other parts, can have no action and no existence. The government is the point of reference of the several members and districts of our representation. This is the centre of our unity. This government of reference is a trustee for the *whole,* and not for the parts. So is the other branch of our public council, I mean the House of Lords. With us the king and the lords are several and joint securities for the equality of each district, each province, each city. When did you hear in Great Britain of any province suffering from the inequality of its representation; what district from having no representation at all? Not only our monarchy and our peerage secure the equalty on which our unity depends, but it is the spirit of the House of Commons itself. The very inequality of representation, which is so foolishly complained of, is perhaps the very thing which prevents us from thinking or acting as members for districts. Cornwall elects as many members as all Scotland. But is Cornwall better taken care of than Scotland? Few trouble their heads about any of your bases, out of some giddy clubs. Most of those who wish for any change, upon any plausible grounds, desire it on different ideas.

Your new constitution is the very reverse of ours in its principle; and I am astonished how any persons could dream of holding out anything done in it, as an example for Great Britain. With you there is little, or rather no, connexion between the last representative and the first constituent. The member who goes to the National Assembly is not chosen by the people, nor accountable to them. There are three elections before he is chosen: two sets of magistracy intervene between him and the primary assembly, so as to render him, as I have said, an ambassador of a state, and not the representative of the people within a state. By this the whole spirit of the election is changed; nor can any corrective, which your constitution-mongers have devised, render him anything else than what he is. The very attempt to do it would inevitably introduce a confusion, if possible, more horrid than the present. There is no way to make a connexion between the original constituent and the representative, but by the circuitous means which may lead the candidate to apply in the first instance to the primary

electors, in order that by their authoritative instructions (and something more perhaps) these primary electors may force the two succeeding bodies of electors to make a choice agreeable to their wishes. But this would plainly subvert the whole scheme. It would be to plunge them back into that tumult and confusion of popular election, which, by their interposed gradation of elections, they mean to avoid, and at length to risk the whole fortune of the state with those who have the least knowledge of it, and the least interest in it. This is a perpetual dilemma, into which they are thrown by the vicious, weak, and contradictory principles they have chosen. Unless the people break up and level this gradation, it is plain that they do not at all substantially elect to the Assembly; indeed they elect as little in appearance as reality.

What is it we all seek for in an election? To answer its real purposes, you must first possess the means of knowing the fitness of your man; and then you must retain some hold upon him by personal obligation or dependence. For what end are these primary electors complimented, or rather mocked, with a choice? They can never know anything of the qualities of him that is to serve them, nor has he any obligation whatsoever to them. Of all the powers unfit to be delegated by those who have any real means of judging, that most peculiarly unfit is what relates to a *personal* choice. In cause of abuse, that body of primary electors never can call the representative to an account for his conduct. He is too far removed from them in the chain of representation. If he acts improperly at the end of his two years' lease, it does not concern him for two years' more. By the new French constitution the best and the wisest representatives go equally with the worst into this *Limbus Patrum.*[99] Their bottoms are supposed foul, and they must go into dock to be refitted. Every man who has served in an assembly is ineligible for two years after. Just as these magistrates begin to learn their trade, like chimney-sweepers, they are disqualified for exercising it. Superficial, new, petulant acquisition, and interrupted, dronish, broken, ill recollection, is to be the destined character of all your future governors. Your constitution has too much of jealousy to have much of sense in it. You consider the breath of trust in the representative so principally, that you do not at all regard the question of his fitness to execute it.

99. *Limbus Patrum*: Limbo of the Fathers, the concept that those who had been just and who had died before the coming of Christ lived in a temporary condition of happiness that was distinct from purgatory until the second coming of Christ

This purgatory interval is not unfavourable to a faithless representative, who may be as good a canvasser as he was a bad governor. In this time he may cabal himself into a superiority over the wisest and most virtuous. As, in the end, all the members of this elective constitution are equally fugitive, and exist only for the election, they may be no longer the same persons who had chosen him, to whom he is to be responsible when he solicits for a renewal of his trust. To call all the secondary electors of the *Commune* to account, is ridiculous, impracticable, and unjust; they may themselves have been deceived in their choice, as the third set of electors, those of the *Department,* may be in theirs. In your elections responsibility cannot exist.

Finding no sort of principle of coherence with each other in the nature and constitution of the several new republics of France, I considered what cement the legislators had provided for them from any extraneous materials. Their confederations, their *spectacles,* their civic feasts, and their enthusiasm, I take no notice of; they are nothing but mere tricks; but tracing their policy through their actions, I think I can distinguish the arrangements by which they propose to hold these republics together. The first, is the *confiscation,* with the compulsory paper currency annexed to it; the second, is the supreme power of the city of Paris; the third, is the general army of the state. Of this last I shall reserve what I have to say, until I come to consider the army as a head by itself.

As to the operation of the first (the confiscation and paper currency) merely as a cement, I cannot deny that these, the one depending on the other, may for some time compose some sort of cement, if their madness and folly in the management, and in the tempering of the parts together, does not produce a repulsion in the very outset. But allowing to the scheme some coherence and some duration, it appears to me, that if, after a while, the confiscation should not be found sufficient to support the paper coinage, (as I am morally certain it will not,) then, instead of cementing, it will add infinitely to the dissociation, distraction, and confusion of these confederate republics, both with relation to each other, and to the several parts within themselves. But if the confiscation should so far succeed as to sink the paper currency, the cement is gone with the circulation. In the mean time its binding force will be very uncertain, and it will straiten or relax with every variation in the credit of the paper.

One thing only is certain in this scheme, which is an effect seemingly collateral, but direct, I have no doubt, in the minds of those who conduct

this business, that is, its effect in producing an *Oligarchy* in every one of the republics. A paper circulation, not founded on any real money deposited or engaged for, amounting already to four-and-forty millions of English money, and this currency by force substituted in the place of the coin of the kingdom, becoming thereby the substance of its revenue, as well as the medium of all its commercial and civil intercourse, must put the whole of what power, authority, and influence is left, in any form whatsoever it may assume, into the hands of the managers and conductors of this circulation.

In England we feel the influence of the bank; though it is only the centre of a voluntary dealing. He knows little indeed of the influence of money upon mankind, who does not see the force of the management of a monied concern, which is so much more extensive, and in its nature so much more depending on the managers, than any of ours. But this is not merely a money concern. There is another member in the system inseparably connected with this money management. It consists in the means of drawing out at discretion portions of the confiscated lands for sale; and carrying on a process of continual transmutation of paper into land, and land into paper. When we follow this process in its effects, we may conceive something of the intensity of the force with which this system must operate. By this means the spirit of money-jobbing and speculation goes into the mass of land itself, and incorporates with it. By this kind of operation, that species of property becomes (as it were) volatilized; it assumes an unnatural and monstrous activity, and thereby throws into the hands of the several managers, principal and subordinate, Parisian and provincial, all the representative of money, and perhaps a full tenth part of all the land in France, which has now acquired the worst and most pernicious part of the evil of a paper circulation, the greatest possible uncertainty in its value. They have reversed the Latonian kindness to the landed property of Delos. They have sent theirs to be blown about, like the light fragments of a wreck, *oras et littora circum.*[100]

The new dealers, being all habitually adventurers, and without any fixed habits or local predilections, will purchase to job out again, as the market of paper, or of money, or of land, shall present an advantage. For though a holy bishop thinks that agriculture will derive great advantages from the "*enlightened*" usurers who are to purchase the church confiscations, I, who am not a good, but an old farmer, with great humility beg leave to tell his late lordship, that usury is not a tutor of agriculture; and if the word

"enlightened" be understood according to the new dictionary, as it always is in your new schools, I cannot conceive how a man's not believing in God can teach him to cultivate the earth with the least of any additional skill or encouragement. "Diis immortalibus sero," said an old Roman, when he held one handle of the plough, whilst Death held the other.[101]

100. *oras et littora circum*: "Round coasts and shores." Virgil, *Aeneid,* III, 75.

Though you were to join in the commission of all the directors of the two academies to the directors of the *Caisse d'Escompte,* one old, experienced peasant is worth them all. I have got more information upon a curious and interesting branch of husbandry, in one short conversation with an old Carthusian monk, than I have derived from all the Bank directors that I have ever conversed with. However, there is no cause for apprehension from the meddling of money-dealers with rural economy. These gentlemen are too wise in their generation. At first, perhaps, their tender and susceptible imaginations may be captivated with the innocent and unprofitable delights of a pastoral life; but in a little time they will find that agriculture is a trade much more laborious, and much less lucrative, than that which they had left. After making its panegyric, they will turn their backs on it like their great precursor and prototype. They may, like him, begin by singing "*Beatus ille*"—but what will be the end?

> *Hæc ubi locutus fœnerator Alphius,*
> *Jam jam futurus rusticus*
> *Omnem relegit idibus pecuniam;*
> *Quærit calendis ponere.*[102]

They will cultivate the *Caisse d'Eglise,* under the sacred auspices of this prelate, with much more profit than its vineyards and its cornfields.[103]

101. The elderly farmer's answer to the question "for whom he is planting?" is "For the immortal gods . . . " Cicero, *De senectute,* VII, 25, Andrew P. Peabody, trans. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1884), 18.

102. So did the money-lender Appius speak,
Resolved to be a swain,
And got his money in; within a week
Would put it out again.
Horace, *Epode,* 2: 67–70, in S. A. Courtauld, ed., *The Odes and Epodes of Horace: Metrical Translations by Various Authors,* 3rd ed. (London: Bickers and Son, 1929), 341.

103. *Caisse d'Escompte—Caisse d'Eglise*. Burke is drawing a distinction between what he regarded as a legitimate bank, the Caisse d'Escompte, chartered by the French government in 1761, and the Caisse d'Eglise, the term he used to describe what he regarded as the wholly illegitimate and untrustworthy financial arrangements of the revolutionary French government, which issued bonds backed by the income from the confiscated lands of the French Church. The Caisse d'Escompte was closed by the revolutionary government in 1793.

They will employ their talents according to their habits and their interests. They will not follow the plough whilst they can direct treasuries, and govern provinces.

Your legislators, in everything new, are the very first who have founded a commonwealth upon gaming, and infused this spirit into it as its vital breath. The great object in these politics is to metamorphose France from a great kingdom into one great play-table; to turn its inhabitants into a nation of gamesters; to make speculation as extensive as life; to mix it with all its concerns; and to divert the whole of the hopes and fears of the people from their usual channels into the impulses, passions, and superstitions of those who live on chances. They loudly proclaim their opinion, that this their present system of a republic cannot possibly exist without this kind of gaming fund; and that the very thread of its life is spun out of the staple of these speculations. The old gaming in funds was mischievous enough undoubtedly; but it was so only to individuals. Even when it had its greatest extent, in the Mississippi and South Sea, it affected but few, comparatively; where it extends further, as in lotteries, the spirit has but a single object.[104]

But where the law, which in most circumstances forbids, and in none countenances, gaming, is itself debauched, so as to reverse its nature and policy, and expressly to force the subject to this destructive table, by bringing the spirit and symbols of gaming into the minutest matters, and engaging everybody in it, and in everything, a more dreadful epidemic distemper of that kind is spread than yet has appeared in the world. With you a man can neither earn nor buy his dinner without a speculation. What he receives in the morning will not have the same value at night. What he is compelled to take as pay for an old debt will not be received as the same when he comes to pay a debt contracted by himself; nor will it be the same when by prompt payment he would avoid contracting any debt at all. Industry must wither away. Economy must be driven from your country. Careful provision will have no existence. Who will labour without knowing the amount of his pay? Who will study to increase what none can estimate?

Who will accumulate, when he does not know the value of what he saves? If you abstract it from its uses in gaming, to accumulate your paper wealth, would be not the providence of a man, but the distempered instinct of a jackdaw.

The truly melancholy part of the policy of systematically making a nation of gamesters is this, that though all are forced to play, few can understand the game; and fewer still are in a condition to avail themselves of the knowledge.

104. The Mississippi and South Sea Bubbles were early eighteenth-century financial scandals in France and Great Britain, respectively, which embarrassed the governmental ministries of the day.

The many must be the dupes of the few who conduct the machine of these speculations. What effect it must have on the country people is visible. The townsman can calculate from day to day; not so the inhabitant of the country. When the peasant first brings his corn to market, the magistrate in the towns obliges him to take the assignat at par; when he goes to the shop with his money, he finds it seven per cent. the worse for crossing the way. This market he will not readily resort to again. The townspeople will be inflamed; they will force the country people to bring their corn. Resistance will begin, and the murders of Paris and St. Denis may be renewed through all France.

What signifies the empty compliment paid to the country, by giving it, perhaps, more than its share in the theory of your representation? Where have you placed the real power over monied and landed circulation? Where have you placed the means of raising and falling the value of every man's freehold? Those, whose operations can take from, or add ten per cent. to, the possessions of every man in France, must be the masters of every man in France. The whole of the power obtained by this revolution will settle in the towns among the burghers, and the monied directors who lead them. The landed gentleman, the yeoman, and the peasant, have, none of them, habits, or inclinations, or experience, which can lead them to any share in this the sole source of power and influence now left in France. The very nature of country life, the very nature of landed property, in all the occupations, and all the pleasures they afford, render combination and arrangement (the sole way of procuring and exerting influence) in a manner impossible amongst country people. Combine them by all the art you can,

and all the industry, they are always dissolving into individuality. Anything in the nature of incorporation is almost impracticable amongst them. Hope, fear, alarm, jealousy, the ephemerous tale that does its business and dies in a day, all these things, which are the reins and spurs by which leaders check or urge the minds of followers, are not easily employed, or hardly at all, amongst scattered people. They assemble, they arm, they act, with the utmost difficulty, and at the greatest charge. Their efforts, if ever they can be commenced, cannot be sustained. They cannot proceed systematically. If the country gentlemen attempt an influence through the mere income of their property, what is it to that of those who have ten times their income to sell, and who can ruin their property by bringing their plunder to meet it at market? If the landed man wishes to mortgage, he falls the value of his land, and raises the value of assignats. He augments the power of his enemy by the very means he must take to contend with him. The country gentleman therefore, the officer by sea and land, the man of liberal views and habits, attached to no profession, will be as completely excluded from the government of his country as if he were legislatively proscribed. It is obvious, that in the towns, all the things which conspire against the country gentleman combine in favour of the money manager and director. In towns combination is natural. The habits of burghers, their occupations, their diversion, their business, their idleness, continually bring them into mutual contact. Their virtues and their vices are sociable; they are always in garrison; and they come embodied and half disciplined into the hands of those who mean to form them for civil or military action.

All these considerations leave no doubt on my mind, that, if this monster of a constitution can continue, France will be wholly governed by the agitators in corporations, by societies in the towns formed of directors of assignats, and trustees for the sale of church lands, attornies, agents, money-jobbers, speculators, and adventurers, composing an ignoble oligarchy, founded on the destruction of the crown, the church, the nobility, and the people. Here end all the deceitful dreams and visions of the equality and rights of men. In “the Serbonian bog” of this base oligarchy they are all absorbed, sunk, and lost for ever.

Though human eyes cannot trace them, one would be tempted to think some great offences in France must cry to heaven, which has thought fit to punish it with a subjection to a vile and inglorious domination, in which no comfort or compensation is to be found in any even of those false

splendours, which, playing about other tyrannies, prevent mankind from feeling themselves dishonoured even whilst they are oppressed. I must confess I am touched with a sorrow, mixed with some indignation, at the conduct of a few men, once of great rank, and still of great character, who, deluded with specious names, have engaged in a business too deep for the line of their understanding to fathom; who have lent their fair reputation, and the authority of their high-sounding names, to the designs of men with whom they could not be acquainted; and have thereby made their very virtues operate to the ruin of their country.

So far as to the first cementing principle.

The second material of cement for their new republic is the superiority of the city of Paris: and this I admit is strongly connected with the other cementing principle of paper circulation and confiscation. It is in this part of the project we must look for the cause of the destruction of all the old bounds of provinces and jurisdictions, ecclesiastical and secular, and the dissolution of all ancient combinations of things, as well as the formation of so many small unconnected republics. The power of the city of Paris is evidently one great spring of all their politics. It is through the power of Paris, now become the centre and focus of jobbing, that the leaders of this faction direct, or rather command, the whole legislative and the whole executive government. Everything therefore must be done which can confirm the authority of that city over the other republics. Paris is compact; she has an enormous strength, wholly disproportioned to the force of any of the square republics; and this strength is collected and condensed within a narrow compass. Paris has a natural and easy connexion of its parts, which will not be affected by any scheme of a geometrical constitution, nor does it much signify whether its proportion of representation be more or less, since it has the whole draft of fishes in its drag-net. The other divisions of the kingdom being hackled and torn to pieces, and separated from all their habitual means, and even principles of union, cannot, for some time at least, confederate against her. Nothing was to be left in all the subordinate members, but weakness, disconnexion, and confusion. To confirm this part of the plan, the Assembly has lately come to a resolution, that no two of their republics shall have the same commander-in-chief.

To a person who takes a view of the whole, the strength of Paris, thus formed, will appear a system of general weakness. It is boasted that the geometrical policy has been adopted, that all local ideas should be sunk,

and that the people should no longer be Gascons, Picards, Bretons, Normans; but Frenchmen, with one country, one heart, and one Assembly. But instead of being all Frenchmen, the greater likelihood is, that the inhabitants of that region will shortly have no country. No man ever was attached by a sense of pride, partiality, or real affection, to a description of square measurement. He never will glory in belonging to the Chequer No. 71, or to any other badge-ticket. We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connexions. These are inns and resting-places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love to the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality. Perhaps it is a sort of elemental training to those higher and more large regards, by which alone men come to be affected, as with their own concern, in the prosperity of a kingdom so extensive as that of France. In that general territory itself, as in the old name of provinces, the citizens are interested from old prejudices and unreasoned habits, and not on account of the geometric properties of its figure. The power and pre-eminence of Paris does certainly press down and hold these republics together as long as it lasts. But, for the reasons I have already given you, I think it cannot last very long.

Passing from the civil creating and the civil cementing principles of this constitution, to the National Assembly, which is to appear and act as sovereign, we see a body in its constitution with every possible power, and no possible external control. We see a body without fundamental laws, without established maxims, without respected rules of proceeding, which nothing can keep firm to any system whatsoever. Their idea of their powers is always taken at the utmost stretch of legislative competency, and their examples for common cases from the exceptions of the most urgent necessity. The future is to be in most respects like the present Assembly; but, by the mode of the new elections and the tendency of the new circulations, it will be purged of the small degree of internal control existing in a minority chosen originally from various interests, and preserving something of their spirit. If possible, the next Assembly must be worse than the present. The present, by destroying and altering everything, will leave to their successors apparently nothing popular to do. They will be roused by

emulation and example to enterprises the boldest and the most absurd. To suppose such an assembly sitting in perfect quietude is ridiculous.

Your all-sufficient legislators, in their hurry to do everything at once, have forgot one thing that seems essential, and which I believe never has been before, in the theory or the practice, omitted by any projector of a republic. They have forgot to constitute a *senate,* or something of that nature and character. Never, before this time, was heard of a body politic composed of one legislative and active assembly, and its executive officers, without such a council; without something to which foreign states might connect themselves; something to which, in the ordinary detail of government, the people could look up; something which might give a bias, and steadiness, and preserve something like consistency in the proceedings of state. Such a body kings generally have as a council. A monarchy may exist without it; but it seems to be in the very essence of a republican government. It holds a sort of middle place between the supreme power exercised by the people, or immediately delegated from them, and the mere executive. Of this there are no traces in your constitution; and, in providing nothing of this kind, your Solons and Numas have, as much as in anything else, discovered a sovereign incapacity.

Let us now turn our eyes to what they have done towards the formation of an executive power. For this they have chosen a degraded king. This their first executive officer is to be a machine, without any sort of deliberative discretion in any one act of his function. At best he is but a channel to convey to the National Assembly such matter as it may import that body to know. If he had been made the exclusive channel, the power would not have been without its importance; though infinitely perilous to those who would choose to exercise it. But public intelligence and statement of facts may pass to the Assembly with equal authenticity, through any other conveyance. As to the means, therefore, of giving a direction to measures by the statement of an authorized reporter, this office of intelligence is as nothing.

To consider the French scheme of an executive officer, in its two natural divisions of civil and political.—In the first it must be observed, that, according to the new constitution, the higher parts of judicature, in either of its lines, are not in the king. The king of France is not the fountain of justice. The judges, neither the original nor the appellate, are of his nomination. He neither proposes the candidates, nor has a negative on the

choice. He is not even the public prosecutor. He serves only as a notary to authenticate the choice made of the judges in the several districts. By his officers he is to execute their sentence. When we look into the true nature of his authority, he appears to be nothing more than a chief of bumbailiffs, serjeants at mace, catchpoles, jailers, and hangmen. It is impossible to place anything called royalty in a more degrading point of view. A thousand times better had it been for the dignity of this unhappy prince, that he had nothing at all to do with the administration of justice, deprived as he is of all that is venerable, and all that is consolatory, in that function, without power of originating any process; without a power of suspension, mitigation, or pardon. Everything in justice that is vile and odious is thrown upon him. It was not for nothing that the Assembly has been at such pains to remove the stigma from certain offices, when they are resolved to place the person who had lately been their king in a situation but one degree above the executioner, and in an office nearly of the same quality. It is not in nature, that, situated as the king of the French now is, he can respect himself, or can be respected by others.

View this new executive officer on the side of his political capacity, as he acts under the orders of the National Assembly. To execute laws is a royal office; to execute orders is not to be a king. However, a political executive magistracy, though merely such, is a great trust. It is a trust indeed that has much depending upon its faithful and diligent performance, both in the person presiding in it and in all its subordinates. Means of performing this duty ought to be given by regulation; and dispositions towards it ought to be infused by the circumstances attendant on the trust. It ought to be environed with dignity, authority, and consideration, and it ought to lead to glory. The office of execution is an office of exertion. It is not from impotence we are to expect the tasks of power. What sort of person is a king to command executory service, who has no means whatsoever to reward it? Not in a permanent office; not in a grant of land; no, not in a pension of fifty pounds a year; not in the vainest and most trivial title. In France the king is no more the fountain of honour than he is the fountain of justice. All rewards, all distinctions, are in other hands. Those who serve the king can be actuated by no natural motive but fear; by a fear of everything except their master. His functions of internal coercion are as odious as those which he exercises in the department of justice. If relief is to be given to any municipality, the Assembly gives it. If troops are

to be sent to reduce them to obedience to the Assembly, the king is to execute the order; and upon every occasion he is to be spattered over with the blood of his people. He has no negative; yet his name and authority is used to enforce every harsh decree. Nay, he must concur in the butchery of those who shall attempt to free him from his imprisonment, or show the slightest attachment to his person or to his ancient authority.

Executive magistracy ought to be constituted in such a manner, that those who compose it should be disposed to love and to venerate those whom they are bound to obey. A purposed neglect, or, what is worse, a literal but perverse and malignant obedience, must be the ruin of the wisest counsels. In vain will the law attempt to anticipate or to follow such studied neglects and fraudulent attentions. To make them act zealously is not in the competence of law. Kings, even such as are truly kings, may and ought to bear the freedom of subjects that are obnoxious to them. They may too, without derogating from themselves, bear even the authority of such persons, if it promotes their service. Louis the Thirteenth mortally hated the Cardinal de Richelieu; but his support of that minister against his rivals was the source of all the glory of his reign, and the solid foundation of his throne itself. Louis the Fourteenth, when come to the throne, did not love the Cardinal Mazarin; but for his interests he preserved him in power. When old, he detested Louvois; but for years, whilst he faithfully served his greatness, he endured his person. When George the Second took Mr. Pitt, who certainly was not agreeable to him, into his councils, he did nothing which could humble a wise sovereign. But these ministers, who were chosen by affairs, not by affections, acted in the name of, and in trust for, kings; and not as their avowed, constitutional, and ostensible masters. I think it impossible that any king, when he has recovered his first terrors, can cordially infuse vivacity and vigour into measures which he knows to be dictated by those, who, he must be persuaded, are in the highest degree ill affected to his person. Will any ministers, who serve such a king (or whatever he may be called) with but a decent appearance of respect, cordially obey the orders of those whom but the other day in his name they had committed to the Bastille? will they obey the orders of those whom, whilst they were exercising despotic justice upon them, they conceived they were treating with lenity; and from whom, in a prison, they thought they had provided an asylum? If you expect such obedience, amongst your other innovations and regenerations, you ought to make a revolution in nature,

and provide a new constitution for the human mind. Otherwise, your supreme government cannot harmonize with its executory system. There are cases in which we cannot take up with names and abstractions. You may call half a dozen leading individuals, whom we have reason to fear and hate, the nation. It makes no other difference, than to make us fear and hate them the more. If it had been thought justifiable and expedient to make such a revolution by such means, and through such persons, as you have made yours, it would have been more wise to have completed the business of the fifth and sixth of October. The new executive officer would then owe his situation to those who are his creators as well as his masters; and he might be bound in interest, in the society of crime, and (if in crimes there could be virtues) in gratitude, to serve those who had promoted him to a place of great lucre and great sensual indulgence; and of something more: for more he must have received from those who certainly would not have limited an aggrandized creature, as they have done a submitting antagonist.

A king circumstanced as the present, if he is totally stupified by his misfortunes, so as to think it not the necessity, but the premium and privilege, of life, to eat and sleep, without any regard to glory, can never be fit for the office. If he feels as men commonly feel, he must be sensible, that an office so circumstanced is one in which he can obtain no fame or reputation. He has no generous interest that can excite him to action. At best, his conduct will be passive and defensive. To inferior people such an office might be matter of honour. But to be raised to it, and to descend to it, are different things, and suggest different sentiments. Does he *really* name the ministers? They will have a sympathy with him. Are they forced upon him? The whole business between them and the nominal king will be mutual counteraction. In all other countries, the office of ministers of state is of the highest dignity. In France it is full of peril, and incapable of glory. Rivals however they will have in their nothingness, whilst shallow ambition exists in the world, or the desire of a miserable salary is an incentive to shortsighted avarice. Those competitors of the ministers are enabled by your constitution to attack them in their vital parts, whilst they have not the means of repelling their charges in any other than the degrading character of culprits. The ministers of state in France are the only persons in that country who are incapable of a share in the national councils. What ministers! What councils! What a nation!—But they are responsible. It is a poor service that is to be had from responsibility. The elevation of mind to be derived from

fear will never make a nation glorious. Responsibility prevents crimes. It makes all attempts against the laws dangerous. But for a principle of active and zealous service, none but idiots could think of it. Is the conduct of a war to be trusted to a man who may abhor its principle; who, in every step he may take to render it successful, confirms the power of those by whom he is oppressed? Will foreign states seriously treat with him who has no prerogative of peace or war; no, not so much as in a single vote by himself or his ministers, or by any one whom he can possibly influence? A state of contempt is not a state for a prince: better get rid of him at once.

I know it will be said that these humours in the court and executive government will continue only through this generation; and that the king has been brought to declare the dauphin shall be educated in a conformity to his situation. If he is made to conform to his situation, he will have no education at all. His training must be worse even than that of an arbitrary monarch. If he reads—whether he reads or not, some good or evil genius will tell him his ancestors were kings. Thenceforward his object must be to assert himself, and to avenge his parents. This you will say is not his duty. That may be; but it is nature; and whilst you pique nature against you, you do unwisely to trust to duty. In this futile scheme of polity, the state nurses in its bosom, for the present, a source of weakness, perplexity, counteraction, inefficiency, and decay; and it prepares the means of its final ruin. In short, I see nothing in the executive force (I cannot call it authority) that has even an appearance of vigour, or that has the smallest degree of just correspondence or symmetry, or amicable relation with the supreme power, either as it now exists, or as it is planned for the future government.

You have settled, by an economy as perverted as the policy, two establishments of government; one real, one fictitious.[105] Both maintained at a vast expense; but the fictitious at, I think, the greatest. Such a machine as the latter is not worth the grease of its wheels. The expense is exorbitant; and neither the show nor the use deserve the tenth part of the charge. Oh! but I don’t do justice to the talents of the legislators: I don’t allow, as I ought to do, for necessity. Their scheme of executive force was not their choice. This pageant must be kept. The people would not consent to part with it.

105. * In reality three, to reckon the provincial republican establishments.

Right; I understand you. You do, in spite of your grand theories, to which you would have heaven and earth to bend, you do know how to conform yourselves to the nature and circumstances of things. But when you were obliged to conform thus far to circumstances, you ought to have carried your submission farther, and to have made, what you were obliged to take, a proper instrument, and useful to its end. That was in your power. For instance, among many others, it was in your power to leave to your king the right of peace and war. What! to leave to the executive magistrate the most dangerous of all prerogatives? I know none more dangerous; nor any one more necessary to be so trusted. I do not say that this prerogative ought to be trusted to your king, unless he enjoyed other auxiliary trusts along with it, which he does not now hold. But, if he did possess them, hazardous as they are undoubtedly, advantages would arise from such a constitution, more than compensating the risk. There is no other way of keeping the several potentates of Europe from intriguing distinctly and personally with the members of your Assembly, from intermeddling in all your concerns, and fomenting, in the heart of your country, the most pernicious of all factions; factions in the interest and under the direction of foreign powers. From that worst of evils, thank God, we are still free. Your skill, if you had any, would be well employed to find out indirect correctives and controls upon this perilous trust. If you did not like those which in England we have chosen, your leaders might have exerted their abilities in contriving better. If it were necessary to exemplify the consequences of such an executive government as yours, in the management of great affairs, I should refer you to the late reports of M. de Montmorin to the National Assembly, and all the other proceedings relative to the differences between Great Britain and Spain. It would be treating your understanding with disrespect to point them out to you.

I hear that the persons who are called ministers have signified an intention of resigning their places. I am rather astonished that they have not resigned long since. For the universe I would not have stood in the situation in which they have been for this last twelvemonth. They wished well, I take it for granted, to the Revolution. Let this fact be as it may, they could not, placed as they were upon an eminence, though an eminence of humiliation, but be the first to see collectively, and to feel each in his own department, the evils which have been produced by that revolution. In every step which they took, or forebore to take, they must have felt the degraded situation of

their country, and their utter incapacity of serving it. They are in a species of subordinate servitude, in which no men before them were ever seen. Without confidence from their sovereign, on whom they were forced, or from the Assembly who forced them upon him, all the noble functions of their office are executed by committees of the Assembly, without any regard whatsoever to their personal or their official authority. They are to execute, without power; they are to be responsible, without discretion; they are to deliberate, without choice. In their puzzled situation, under two sovereigns, over neither of whom they have any influence, they must act in such a manner as (in effect, whatever they may intend) sometimes to betray the one, sometimes the other, and always to betray themselves. Such has been their situation; such must be the situation of those who succeed them. I have much respect, and many good wishes, for M. Necker. I am obliged to him for attentions. I thought when his enemies had driven him from Versailles, that his exile was a subject of most serious congratulation—*sed multæ urbes et publica vota vicerunt.*[106] He is now sitting on the ruins of the finances, and of the monarchy of France.

A great deal more might be observed on the strange constitution of the executory part of the new government; but fatigue must give bounds to the discussion of subjects, which in themselves have hardly any limits.

As little genius and talent am I able to perceive in the plan of judicature formed by the National Assembly. According to their invariable course, the framers of your constitution have begun with the utter abolition of the parliaments. These venerable bodies, like the rest of the old government, stood in need of reform, even though there should be no change made in the monarchy. They required several more alterations to adapt them to the system of a free constitution. But they had particulars in their constitution, and those not a few, which deserved approbation from the wise. They possessed one fundamental excellence; they were independent. The most doubtful circumstance attendant on their office, that of its being vendible, contributed however to this independency of character. They held for life. Indeed they may be said to have held by inheritance. Appointed by the monarch, they were considered as nearly out of his power. The most determined exertions of that authority against them only showed their radical independence. They composed permanent bodies politic, constituted to resist arbitrary innovation; and from that corporate constitution, and from most of their forms, they were well calculated to afford both certainty and

stability to the laws. They had been a safe asylum to secure these laws, in all the revolutions of humour and opinion.

106. "A fever she should have preferred to the anxious prayers of the cities. These restored him to health, but he was saved to be conquered." Juvenal, *Satires,* 10: 284–85 in *Satires of Juvenal,* 131. What Burke means to convey is that Necker's popularity led to his profound fall.

They had saved that sacred deposit of the country during the reigns of arbitrary princes, and the struggles of arbitrary factions. They kept alive the memory and record of the constitution. They were the great security to private property; which might be said (when personal liberty had no existence) to be, in fact, as well guarded in France as in any other country. Whatever is supreme in a state, ought to have, as much as possible, its judicial authority so constituted as not only not to depend upon it, but in some sort to balance it. It ought to give a security to its justice against its power. It ought to make its judicature, as it were, something exterior to the state.

These parliaments had furnished, not the best certainly, but some considerable corrective to the excesses and vices of the monarchy. Such an independent judicature was ten times more necessary when a democracy became the absolute power of the country. In that constitution, elective, temporary, local judges, such as you have contrived, exercising their dependent functions in a narrow society, must be the worst of all tribunals. In them it will be vain to look for any appearance of justice towards strangers, towards the obnoxious rich, towards the minority of routed parties, towards all those who in the election have supported unsuccessful candidates. It will be impossible to keep the new tribunals clear of the worst spirit of faction. All contrivances by ballot we know experimentally to be vain and childish to prevent a discovery of inclinations. Where they may the best answer the purposes of concealment, they answer to produce suspicion, and this is a still more mischievous cause of partiality.

If the parliaments had been preserved, instead of being dissolved at so ruinous a change to the nation, they might have served in this new commonwealth, perhaps not precisely the same, (I do not mean an exact parallel,) but nearly the same, purposes as the court and senate of Areopagus did in Athens; that is, as one of the balances and correctives to the evils of a light and unjust democracy. Every one knows that this tribunal was the great stay of that state; every one knows with what care it was

upheld, and with what a religious awe it was consecrated. The parliaments were not wholly free from faction, I admit; but this evil was exterior and accidental, and not so much the vice of their constitution itself, as it must be in your new contrivance of sexennial elective judicatories. Several English commend the abolition of the old tribunals, as supposing that they determined everything by bribery and corruption. But they have stood the test of monarchic and republican scrutiny. The court was well disposed to prove corruption on those bodies when they were dissolved in 1771.—Those who have again dissolved them would have done the same if they could—but both inquisitions having failed, I conclude, that gross pecuniary corruption must have been rather rare amongst them.

It would have been prudent, along with the parliaments, to preserve their ancient power of registering, and of remonstrating at least, upon all the decrees of the National Assembly, as they did upon those which passed in the time of the monarchy. It would be a means of squaring the occasional decrees of a democracy to some principles of general jurisprudence. The vice of the ancient democracies, and one cause of their ruin, was, that they ruled, as you do, by occasional decrees, *psephismata*.[107] This practice soon broke in upon the tenour and consistency of the laws; it abated the respect of the people towards them; and totally destroyed them in the end.

Your vesting the power of remonstrance, which, in the time of the monarchy, existed in the parliament of Paris, in your principal executive officer, whom, in spite of common sense, you persevere in calling king, is the height of absurdity. You ought never to suffer remonstrance from him who is to execute. This is to understand neither council nor execution; neither authority nor obedience. The person whom you call king, ought not to have this power, or he ought to have more.

Your present arrangement is strictly judicial. Instead of imitating your monarchy, and seating your judges on a bench of independence, your object is to reduce them to the most blind obedience. As you have changed all things, you have invented new principles of order. You first appoint judges, who, I suppose, are to determine according to law, and then you let them know, that, at some time or other, you intend to give them some law by which they are to determine. Any studies which they have made (if any they have made) are to be useless to them. But to supply these studies, they are to be sworn to obey all the rules, orders, and instructions which from time to time they are to receive from the National Assembly. These if they

submit to, they leave no ground of law to the subject. They become complete and most dangerous instruments in the hands of the governing power, which, in the midst of a cause, or on the prospect of it, may wholly change the rule of decision. If these orders of the National Assembly come to be contrary to the will of the people, who locally choose those judges, such confusion must happen as is terrible to think of. For the judges owe their places to the local authority; and the commands they are sworn to obey come from those who have no share in their appointment. In the mean time they have the example of the court of *Chatelet* to encourage and guide them in the exercise of their functions.[108]

107. *psephismata:* the term describing a decree of the ancient Athenian assembly

That court is to try criminals sent to it by the National Assembly, or brought before it by other courses of delation. They sit under a guard to save their own lives. They know not by what law they judge, nor under what authority they act, nor by what tenure they hold. It is thought that they are sometimes obliged to condemn at peril of their lives. This is not perhaps certain, nor can it be ascertained; but when they acquit, we know they have seen the persons whom they discharge, with perfect impunity to the actors, hanged at the door of their court.

The Assembly indeed promises that they will form a body of law, which shall be short, simple, clear, and so forth. That is, by their short laws, they will leave much to the discretion of the judge; whilst they have exploded the authority of all the learning which could make judicial discretion (a thing perilous at best) deserving the appellation of a *sound* discretion.

It is curious to observe, that the administrative bodies are carefully exempted from the jurisdiction of these new tribunals. That is, those persons are exempted from the power of the laws, who ought to be the most entirely submitted to them. Those who execute public pecuniary trusts, ought of all men to be the most strictly held to their duty. One would have thought that it must have been among your earliest cares, if you did not mean that those administrative bodies should be real, sovereign, independent states, to form an awful tribunal, like your late parliaments, or like our king’s bench, where all corporate officers might obtain protection in the legal exercise of their functions, and would find coercion if they trespassed against their legal duty. But the cause of the exemption is plain.

These administrative bodies are the great instruments of the present leaders in their progress through democracy to oligarchy. They must therefore be put above the law. It will be said, that the legal tribunals which you have made are unfit to coerce them. They are undoubtedly. They are unfit for any rational purpose. It will be said too, that the administrative bodies will be accountable to the general assembly. This I fear is talking without much consideration of the nature of that assembly, or of these corporations. However, to be subject to the pleasure of that assembly, is not to be subject to law either for protection or for constraint.

This establishment of judges as yet wants something to its completion. It is to be crowned by a new tribunal. This is to be a grand state judicature; and it is to judge of crimes committed against the nation, that is, against the power of the Assembly.

108. Court de Châtelet was a court in Paris that heard the most severe cases. A prison of the same name was located within the area of the court.

It seems as if they had something in their view of the nature of the high court of justice erected in England during the time of the great usurpation. As they have not yet finished this part of the scheme, it is impossible to form a right judgment upon it. However, if great care is not taken to form it in a spirit very different from that which has guided them in their proceedings relative to state offences, this tribunal, subservient to their inquisition, *the committee of research,* will extinguish the last sparks of liberty in France, and settle the most dreadful and arbitrary tyranny ever known in any nation. If they wish to give to this tribunal any appearance of liberty and justice, they must not evoke from or send to it the causes relative to their own members, at their pleasure. They must also remove the seat of that tribunal out of the republic of Paris.[109]

Has more wisdom been displayed in the constitution of your army than what is discoverable in your plan of judicature? The able arrangement of this part is the more difficult, and requires the greater skill and attention, not only as a great concern in itself, but as it is the third cementing principle in the new body of republics, which you call the French nation. Truly it is not easy to divine what that army may become at last. You have voted a very large one, and on good appointments, at least fully equal to your apparent means of payment. But what is the principle of its discipline? or whom is it

to obey? You have got the wolf by the ears, and I wish you joy of the happy position in which you have chosen to place yourselves, and in which you are well circumstanced for a free deliberation, relatively to that army, or to anything else.

The minister and secretary of state for the war department is M. de la Tour du Pin. This gentleman, like his colleagues in administration, is a most zealous assertor of the Revolution, and a sanguine admirer of the new constitution, which originated in that event. His statement of facts, relative to the military of France, is important, not only from his official and personal authority, but because it displays very clearly the actual condition of the army in France, and because it throws light on the principles upon which the Assembly proceeds, in the administration of this critical object. It may enable us to form some judgment, how far it may be expedient in this country to imitate the martial policy of France.

M. de la Tour du Pin, on the fourth of last June, comes to give an account of the state of his department, as it exists under the auspices of the National Assembly.

109. * For further elucidations upon the subject of all these judicatures, and of the committee of research, see M. de Calonne's work.

No man knows it so well; no man can express it better. Addressing himself to the National Assembly, he says, "His Majesty has *this day* sent me to apprize you of the multiplied disorders of which *every day* he receives the most distressing intelligence. The army (le corps militaire) threatens to fall into the most turbulent anarchy. Entire regiments have dared to violate at once the respect due to the laws, to the king, to the order established by your decrees, and to the oaths which they have taken with the most awful solemnity. Compelled by my duty to give you information of these excesses, my heart bleeds when I consider who they are that have committed them. Those, against whom it is not in my power to withhold the most grievous complaints, are a part of that very soldiery which to this day have been so full of honour and loyalty, and with whom, for fifty years, I have lived the comrade and the friend.

"What incomprehensible spirit of delirium and delusion has all at once led them astray? Whilst you are indefatigable in establishing uniformity in the empire, and moulding the whole into one coherent and consistent body;

whilst the French are taught by you, at once the respect which the laws owe to the rights of man, and that which the citizens owe to the laws, the administration of the army presents nothing but disturbance and confusion. I see in more than one corps the bonds of discipline relaxed or broken; the most unheard-of pretensions avowed directly and without any disguise; the ordinances without force; the chiefs without authority; the military chest and the colours carried off; the authority of the king himself [*risum teneatis?*][110] proudly defied; the officers despised, degraded, threatened, driven away, and some of them prisoners in the midst of their corps, dragging on a precarious life in the bosom of disgust and humiliation. To fill up the measure of all these horrors, the commandants of places have had their throats cut, under the eyes, and almost in the arms, of their own soldiers.

"These evils are great; but they are not the worst consequences which may be produced by such military insurrections. Sooner or later they may menace the nation itself. *The nature of things requires* that the army should never act but as *an instrument.* The moment that, erecting itself into a deliberative body, it shall act according to its own resolutions, the *government, be it what it may, will immediately degenerate into a military democracy;* a species of political monster, which has always ended by devouring those who have produced it.

"After all this, who must not be alarmed at the irregular consultations, and turbulent committees, formed in some regiments by the common soldiers and non-commissioned officers, without the knowledge, or even in contempt of the authority, of their superiors; although the presence and concurrence of those superiors could give no authority to such monstrous democratic assemblies [comices]."

110. Burke's insertion, inviting the reader to laugh.

It is not necessary to add much to this finished picture: finished as far as its canvass admits; but as I apprehend, not taking in the whole of the nature and complexity of the disorders of this military democracy, which, the minister at war truly and wisely observes, wherever it exists, must be the true constitution of the state, by whatever formal appellation it may pass. For, though he informs the Assembly that the more considerable part of the army have not cast off their obedience, but are still attached to their duty,

yet those travellers, who have seen the corps whose conduct is the best, rather observe in them the absence of mutiny, than the existence of discipline.

I cannot help pausing here for a moment, to reflect upon the expressions of surprise which this minister has let fall, relative to the excesses he relates. To him the departure of the troops from their ancient principles of loyalty and honour seems quite inconceivable. Surely those to whom he addresses himself know the causes of it but too well. They know the doctrines which they have preached, the degrees which they have passed, the practices which they have countenanced. The soldiers remember the 6th of October. They recollect the French guards. They have not forgotten the taking of the king's castles in Paris and Marseilles. That the governors in both places were murdered with impunity, is a fact that has not passed out of their minds. They do not abandon the principles laid down so ostentatiously and laboriously of the equality of men. They cannot shut their eyes to the degradation of the whole noblesse of France, and the suppression of the very idea of a gentleman. The total abolition of titles and distinctions is not lost upon them. But M. de la Tour du Pin is astonished at their disloyalty, when the doctors of the Assembly have taught them at the same time the respect due to laws. It is easy to judge which of the two sorts of lessons men with arms in their hands are likely to learn. As to the authority of the king, we may collect from the minister himself (if any argument on that head were not quite superfluous) that it is not of more consideration with these troops, than it is with everybody else. "The king," says he, "has over and over again repeated his orders to put a stop to these excesses: but, in so terrible a crisis, *your* [the Assembly's] concurrence is become indispensably necessary to prevent the evils which menace the state. *You* unite to the force of the legislative power, *that of opinion* still more important." To be sure the army can have no opinion of the power or authority of the king. Perhaps the soldier has by this time learned, that the Assembly itself does not enjoy a much greater degree of liberty than that royal figure.

It is now to be seen what has been proposed in this exigency, one of the greatest that can happen in a state. The minister requests the Assembly to array itself in all its terrors, and to call forth all its majesty. He desires that the grave and severe principles announced by them may give vigour to the king's proclamation. After this we should have looked for courts civil and

martial; breaking of some corps, decimating of others, and all the terrible means which necessity has employed in such cases to arrest the progress of the most terrible of all evils; particularly, one might expect, that a serious inquiry would be made into the murder of commandants in the view of their soldiers. Not one word of all this, or of anything like it. After they had been told that the soldiery trampled upon the decrees of the Assembly promulgated by the king, the Assembly pass new decrees; and they authorize the king to make new proclamations. After the secretary at war had stated that the regiments had paid no regard to oaths *prêtés avec la plus imposante solemnité*—they propose—what?[111] More oaths. They renew decrees and proclamations as they experience their insufficiency, and they multiply oaths in proportion as they weaken, in the minds of men, the sanctions of religion. I hope that handy abridgments of the excellent sermons of Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, and Helvetius, on the Immortality of the Soul, on a particular superintending Providence, and on a Future State of Rewards and Punishments, are sent down to the soldiers along with their civic oaths. Of this I have no doubt; as I understand that a certain description of reading makes no inconsiderable part of their military exercises, and that they are full as well supplied with the ammunition of pamphlets as of cartridges.

To prevent the mischiefs arising from conspiracies, irregular consultations, seditious committees, and monstrous democratic assemblies ["comitia, comices"] of the soldiers, and all the disorders arising from idleness, luxury, dissipation, and insubordination, I believe the most astonishing means have been used that ever occurred to men, even in all the inventions of this prolific age. It is no less than this:—The king has promulgated in circular letters to all the regiments his direct authority and encouragement, that the several corps should join themselves with the clubs and confederations in the several municipalities, and mix with them in their feasts and civic entertainments! This jolly discipline, it seems, is to soften the ferocity of their minds; to reconcile them to their bottle companions of other descriptions; and to merge particular conspiracies in more general associations.[112]

111. Sworn with the most imposing solemnity.

That this remedy would be pleasing to the soldiers, as they are described by M. de la Tour du Pin, I can readily believe; and that, however mutinous otherwise, they will dutifully submit themselves to *these* royal proclamations. But I should question whether all this civic swearing, clubbing, and feasting, would dispose them, more than at present they are disposed, to an obedience to their officers; or teach them better to submit to the austere rules of military discipline. It will make them admirable citizens after the French mode, but not quite so good soldiers after any mode. A doubt might well arise, whether the conversations at these good tables would fit them a great deal the better for the character of *mere instruments,* which this veteran officer and statesman justly observes the nature of things always requires an army to be.

Concerning the likelihood of this improvement in discipline, by the free conversation of the soldiers with municipal festive societies, which is thus officially encouraged by royal authority and sanction, we may judge by the state of the municipalities themselves, furnished to us by the war minister in this very speech. He conceives good hopes of the success of his endeavours toward restoring order *for the present* from the good disposition of certain regiments; but he finds something cloudy with regard to the future. As to preventing the return of confusion, "for this, the administration (says he) cannot be answerable to you, as long as they see the municipalities arrogate to themselves an authority over the troops, which your institutions have reserved wholly to the monarch. You have fixed the limits of the military authority and the municipal authority.

112. * Comme sa majesté y a reconnu, non une systême d'associations particulières, mais une réunion de volontés de tous les François pour la liberté et la prospérité communes, ainsi pour la maintien de l'ordre publique; il a pensé qu'il convenoit que chaque régiment prit part à ces fêtes civiques pour multiplier les rapports et referrer les liens d'union entre les citoyens et les troupes.

[As His Majesty has recognized in them, not a system of particular associations, but a union of the wills of all Frenchmen for liberty and common prosperity, so as to maintain public order, he has thought it convenient that each regiment take part in these civic festivals so as to expand their relationships and to tighten the bonds of union between citizens and troops. (Frank M. Turner, trans.)]

—Lest I should not be credited, I insert the words, authorizing the troops to feast with the popular confederacies.

You have bounded the action, which you have permitted to the latter over the former, to the right of requisition; but never did the letter or the spirit of your decrees authorize the commons in these municipalities to break the

officers, to try them, to give orders to the soldiers, to drive them from the posts committed to their guard, to stop them in their marches ordered by the king, or, in a word, to enslave the troops to the caprice of each of the cities, or even market towns, through which they are to pass."

Such is the character and disposition of the municipal society which is to reclaim the soldiery, to bring them back to the true principles of military subordination, and to render them machines in the hands of the supreme power of the country! Such are the distempers of the French troops! Such is their cure! As the army is, so is the navy. The municipalities supersede the orders of the Assembly, and the seamen in their turn supersede the orders of the municipalities. From my heart I pity the condition of a respectable servant of the public, like this war minister, obliged in his old age to pledge the Assembly in their civic cups, and to enter with a hoary head into all the fantastic vagaries of these juvenile politicians. Such schemes are not like propositions coming from a man of fifty years' wear and tear amongst mankind. They seem rather such as ought to be expected from those grand compounders in politics, who shorten the road to their degrees in the state; and have a certain inward fanatical assurance and illumination upon all subjects; upon the credit of which one of their doctors has thought fit, with great applause, and greater success, to caution the Assembly not to attend to old men, or to any persons who valued themselves upon their experience. I suppose all the ministers of state must qualify, and take this test; wholly abjuring the errors and heresies of experience and observation. Every man has his own relish. But I think if I could not attain to the wisdom, I would at least preserve something of the stiff and peremptory dignity of age. These gentlemen deal in regeneration: but at any price I should hardly yield my rigid fibres to be regenerated by them; nor begin, in my grand climacteric, to squall in their new accents, or to stammer, in my second cradle, the elemental sounds of their barbarous metaphysics.[113] *Si isti mihi largiantur ut repueriscam, et in eorum cunis vagiam, valde recusem!*[114]

The imbecility of any part of the puerile and pedantic system, which they call a constitution, cannot be laid open without discovering the utter insufficiency and mischief of every other part with which it comes in contact, or that bears any of the remotest relation to it.

113. * This war minister has since quitted the school, and resigned his office.

114. "Indeed, were any god to grant that from my present age I might go back to boyhood, or become a crying child in the cradle, I should steadfastly refuse." Cicero, *De senectute,* XXIII, 83,

You cannot propose a remedy for the incompetence of the crown, without displaying the debility of the Assembly. You cannot deliberate on the confusion of the army of the state, without disclosing the worse disorders of the armed municipalities. The military lays open the civil, and the civil betrays the military, anarchy. I wish everybody carefully to peruse the eloquent speech (such it is) of Mons. de la Tour du Pin. He attributes the salvation of the municipalities to the good behaviour of some of the troops. These troops are to preserve the well-disposed part of those municipalities, which is confessed to be the weakest, from the pillage of the worst disposed, which is the strongest. But the municipalities affect a sovereignty, and will command those troops which are necessary for their protection. Indeed they must command them or court them. The municipalities, by the necessity of their situation, and by the republican powers they have obtained, must, with relation to the military, be the masters, or the servants, or the confederates, or each successively; or they must make a jumble of all together, according to circumstances. What government is there to coerce the army but the municipality, or the municipality but the army? To preserve concord where authority is extinguished, at the hazard of all consequences, the Assembly attempts to cure the distempers by the distempers themselves; and they hope to preserve themselves from a purely military democracy, by giving it a debauched interest in the municipal.

If the soldiers once come to mix for any time in the municipal clubs, cabals, and confederacies, an elective attraction will draw them to the lowest and most desperate part. With them will be their habits, affections, and sympathies. The military conspiracies, which are to be remedied by civic confederacies; the rebellious municipalities, which are to be rendered obedient by furnishing them with the means of seducing the very armies of the state that are to keep them in order; all these chimeras of a monstrous and portentous policy must aggravate the confusion from which they have arisen. There must be blood. The want of common judgment manifested in the construction of all their descriptions of forces, and in all their kinds of civil and judicial authorities, will make it flow. Disorders may be quieted in one time and in one part. They will break out in others; because the evil is radical and intrinsic. All these schemes of mixing mutinous soldiers with seditious citizens must weaken still more and more the military connexion

of soldiers with their officers, as well as add military and mutinous audacity to turbulent artificers and peasants. To secure a real army, the officer should be first and last in the eye of the soldier; first and last in his attention, observance, and esteem. Officers it seems there are to be, whose chief qualification must be temper and patience. They are to manage their troops by electioneering arts. They must bear themselves as candidates, not as commanders. But as by such means power may be occasionally in their hands, the authority by which they are to be nominated becomes of high importance.

What you may do finally does not appear; nor is it of much moment, whilst the strange and contradictory relation between your army and all the parts of your republic, as well as the puzzled relation of those parts to each other to the whole, remain as they are. You seem to have given the provisional nomination of the officers, in the first instance, to the king, with a reserve of approbation by the National Assembly. Men who have an interest to pursue are extremely sagacious in discovering the true seat of power. They must soon perceive that those, who can negative indefinitely, in reality appoint. The officers must therefore look to their intrigues in that Assembly, as the sole, certain road to promotion. Still, however, by your new constitution they must begin their solicitation at court. This double negotiation for military rank seems to me a contrivance as well adapted, as if it were studied for no other end, to promote faction in the Assembly itself, relative to this vast military patronage; and then to poison the corps of officers with factions of a nature still more dangerous to the safety of government, upon any bottom on which it can be placed, and destructive in the end to the efficiency of the army itself. Those officers, who lose the promotions intended for them by the crown, must become of a faction opposite to that of the Assembly which has rejected their claims, and must nourish discontents in the heart of the army against the ruling powers. Those officers, on the other hand, who, by carrying their point through an interest in the Assembly, feel themselves to be at best only second in the good-will of the crown, though first in that of the Assembly, must slight an authority which would not advance and could not retard their promotion. If to avoid these evils you will have no other rule for command or promotion than seniority, you will have an army of formality; at the same time it will become more independent, and more of a military republic. Not they, but the king is the machine. A king is not to be deposed by halves. If he is not

everything in the command of an army, he is nothing. What is the effect of a power placed nominally at the head of the army, who to that army is no object of gratitude, or of fear? Such a cipher is not fit for the administration of an object, of all things the most delicate, the supreme command of military men. They must be constrained (and their inclinations lead them to what their necessities require) by a real, vigorous, effective, decided, personal authority. The authority of the Assembly itself suffers by passing through such a debilitating channel as they have chosen. The army will not long look to an assembly acting through the organ of false show, and palpable imposition. They will not seriously yield obedience to a prisoner. They will either despise a pageant, or they will pity a captive king. This relation of your army to the crown will, if I am not greatly mistaken, become a serious dilemma in your politics.

It is besides to be considered, whether an assembly like yours, even supposing that it was in possession of another sort of organ through which its orders were to pass, is fit for promoting the obedience and discipline of an army. It is known; that armies have hitherto yielded a very precarious and uncertain obedience to any senate, or popular authority; and they will least of all yield it to an assembly which is only to have a continuance of two years. The officers must totally lose the characteristic disposition of military men, if they see with perfect submission and due admiration, the dominion of pleaders; especially when they find that they have a new court to pay to an endless succession of those pleaders; whose military policy, and the genius of whose command, (if they should have any,) must be as uncertain as their duration is transient. In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. There is no other way of securing military obedience in this state of things. But the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your Assembly, the master of your whole republic.

How came the Assembly by their present power over the army? Chiefly, to be sure, by debauching the soldiers from their officers. They have begun by a most terrible operation. They have touched the central point, about

which the particles that compose armies are at repose. They have destroyed the principle of obedience in the great, essential, critical link between the officer and the soldier, just where the chain of military subordination commences and on which the whole of that system depends. The soldier is told he is a citizen, and has the rights of man and citizen. The right of a man, he is told, is to be his own governor, and to be ruled only by those to whom he delegates that self-government. It is very natural he should think that he ought most of all to have his choice where he is to yield the greatest degree of obedience. He will therefore, in all probability, systematically do, what he does at present occasionally; that is, he will exercise at least a negative in the choice of his officers. At present the officers are known at best to be only permissive, and on their good behaviour. In fact, there have been many instances in which they have been cashiered by their corps. Here is a second negative on the choice of the king; a negative as effectual at least as the other of the Assembly. The soldiers know already that it has been a question, not ill received in the National Assembly, whether they ought not to have the direct choice of their officers, or some proportion of them? When such matters are in deliberation it is no extravagant supposition that they will incline to the opinion most favourable to their pretensions. They will not bear to be deemed the army of an imprisoned king, whilst another army in the same country, with whom too they are to feast and confederate, is to be considered as the free army of a free constitution. They will cast their eyes on the other and more permanent army; I mean the municipal. That corps, they well know, does actually elect its own officers. They may not be able to discern the grounds of distinction on which they are not to elect a Marquis de la Fayette (or what is his new name?) of their own. If this election of a commander-in-chief be a part of the rights of men, why not of theirs? They see elective justices of peace, elective judges, elective curates, elective bishops, elective municipalities, and elective commanders of the Parisian army.—Why should they alone be excluded? Are the brave troops of France the only men in that nation who are not the fit judges of military merit, and of the qualifications necessary for a commander-in-chief? Are they paid by the state, and do they therefore lose the rights of men? They are a part of that nation themselves, and contribute to that pay. And is not the king, is not the National Assembly, and are not all who elect the National Assembly, likewise paid? Instead of seeing all these forfeit their rights by their receiving a salary, they perceive

that in all these cases a salary is given for the exercise of those rights. All your resolutions, all your proceedings, all your debates, all the works of your doctors in religion and politics, have industriously been put into their hands; and you expect that they will apply to their own case just as much of your doctrines and examples as suits your pleasure.

Everything depends upon the army in such a government as yours; for you have industriously destroyed all the opinions, and prejudices, and, as far as in you lay, all the instincts which support government. Therefore the moment any difference arises between your National Assembly and any part of the nation, you must have recourse to force. Nothing else is left to you; or rather you have left nothing else to yourselves. You see, by the report of your war minister, that the distribution of the army is in a great measure made with a view of internal coercion.[115]

115. * Courier François, 30th July, 1790. Assemblée Nationale, Numero 210.

You must rule by an army; and you have infused into that army by which you rule, as well as into the whole body of the nation, principles which after a time must disable you in the use you resolve to make of it. The king is to call out troops to act against his people, when the world has been told, and the assertion is still ringing in our ears, that troops ought not to fire on citizens. The colonies assert to themselves an independent constitution and a free trade. They must be constrained by troops. In what chapter of your code of the rights of men are they able to read, that it is a part of the rights of men to have their commerce monopolized and restrained for the benefit of others? As the colonists rise on you, the negroes rise on them. Troops again—Massacre, torture, hanging! These are your rights of men! These are the fruits of metaphysic declarations wantonly made, and shamefully retracted! It was but the other day, that the farmers of land in one of your provinces refused to pay some sort of rents to the lord of the soil. In consequence of this, you decree, that the country people shall pay all rents and dues, except those which as grievances you have abolished; and if they refuse, then you order the king to march troops against them. You lay down metaphysic propositions which infer universal consequences, and then you attempt to limit logic by despotism. The leaders of the present system tell them of their rights, as men, to take fortresses, to murder guards, to seize on kings without the least appearance of authority even from the Assembly,

whilst, as the sovereign legislative body, that Assembly was sitting in the name of the nation—and yet these leaders presume to order out the troops which have acted in these very disorders, to coerce those who shall judge on the principles, and follow the examples, which have been guaranteed by their own approbation.

The leaders teach the people to abhor and reject all feodality as the barbarism of tyranny, and they tell them afterwards how much of that barbarous tyranny they are to bear with patience. As they are prodigal of light with regard to grievances, so the people find them sparing in the extreme with regard to redress. They know that not only certain quit-rents and personal duties, which you have permitted them to redeem, (but have furnished no money for the redemption,) are as nothing to those burthens for which you have made no provision at all. They know, that almost the whole system of landed property in its origin is feudal; that it is the distribution of the possessions of the original proprietors, made by a barbarous conqueror to his barbarous instruments; and that the most grievous effects of the conquest are the land rents of every kind, as without question they are.

The peasants, in all probability, are the descendants of these ancient proprietors, Romans or Gauls. But if they fail, in any degree, in the titles which they make on the principles of antiquaries and lawyers, they retreat into the citadel of the rights of men. There they find that men are equal; and the earth, the kind and equal mother of all, ought not to be monopolized to foster the pride and luxury of any men, who by nature are no better than themselves, and who, if they do not labour for their bread, are worse. They find, that by the laws of nature the occupant and subduer of the soil is the true proprietor; that there is no prescription against nature; and that the agreements (where any there are) which have been made with the landlords, during the time of slavery, are only the effect of duresse and force; and that when the people re-entered into the rights of men, those agreements were made as void, as everything else which had been settled under the prevalence of the old feudal and aristocratic tyranny. They will tell you that they see no difference between an idler with a hat and a national cockade, and an idler in a cowl, or in a rochet. If you ground the title to rents on succession and prescription, they tell you from the speech of M. *Camus,* published by the National Assembly for their information, that things ill begun cannot avail themselves of prescription; that the title of these lords

was vicious in its origin; and that force is at least as bad as fraud. As to the title by succession, they will tell you, that the succession of those who have cultivated the soil is the true pedigree of property, and not rotten parchments and silly substitutions; that the lords have enjoyed their usurpation too long; and that if they allow to these lay monks any charitable pension, they ought to be thankful to the bounty of the true proprietor, who is so generous towards a false claimant to his goods.

When the peasants give you back that coin of sophistic reason, on which you have set your image and superscription, you cry it down as base money, and tell them you will pay for the future with French guards, and dragoons, and hussars. You hold up, to chastise them, the second-hand authority of a king, who is only the instrument of destroying, without any power of protecting either the people or his own person. Through him it seems you will make yourselves obeyed. They answer, You have taught us that there are no gentlemen; and which of your principles teach us to bow to kings whom we have not elected? We know, without your teaching, that lands were given for the support of feudal dignities, feudal titles, and feudal offices. When you took down the cause as a grievance, why should the more grievous effect remain? As there are now no hereditary honours, and no distinguished families, why are we taxed to maintain what you tell us ought not to exist? You have sent down our old aristocratic landlords in no other character, and with no other title, but that of exactors under your authority. Have you endeavoured to make these your rent-gatherers respectable to us? No. You have sent them to us with their arms reversed, their shields broken, their impresses defaced; and so displumed, degraded, and metamorphosed, such unfeathered two-legged things, that we no longer know them. They are strangers to us. They do not even go by the names of our ancient lords. Physically they may be the same men; though we are not quite sure of that, on your new philosophic doctrines of personal identity. In all other respects they are totally changed. We do not see why we have not as good a right to refuse them their rents, as you have to abrogate all their honours, titles, and distinctions. This we have never commissioned you to do; and it is one instance, among many indeed, of your assumption of undelegated power. We see the burghers of Paris, through their clubs, their mobs, and their national guards, directing you at their pleasure, and giving that as law to you, which, under your authority, is transmitted as law to us. Through you, these burghers dispose of the lives and fortunes of us all.

Why should not you attend as much to the desires of the laborious husbandman with regard to our rent, by which we are affected in the most serious manner, as you do to the demands of these insolent burghers, relative to distinctions and titles of honour, by which neither they nor we are affected at all? But we find you pay more regard to their fancies than to our necessities. Is it among the rights of man to pay tribute to his equals? Before this measure of yours, we might have thought we were not perfectly equal. We might have entertained some old, habitual, unmeaning prepossession in favour of those landlords; but we cannot conceive with what other view than that of destroying all respect to them, you could have made the law that degrades them. You have forbidden us to treat them with any of the old formalities of respect, and now you send troops to sabre and to bayonet us into a submission to fear and force, which you did not suffer us to yield to the mild authority of opinion.

The ground of some of these arguments is horrid and ridiculous to all rational ears; but to the politicians of metaphysics who have opened schools for sophistry, and made establishments for anarchy, it is solid and conclusive. It is obvious, that on a mere consideration of the right, the leaders in the Assembly would not in the least have scrupled to abrogate the rents along with the titles and family ensigns. It would be only to follow up the principle of their reasonings, and to complete the analogy of their conduct. But they had newly possessed themselves of a great body of lauded property by confiscation. They had this commodity at market; and the market would have been wholly destroyed, if they were to permit the husbandmen to riot in the speculations with which they so freely intoxicated themselves. The only security which property enjoys in any one of its descriptions, is from the interests of their rapacity with regard to some other. They have left nothing but their own arbitrary pleasure to determine what property is to be protected and what subverted.

Neither have they left any principle by which any of their municipalities can be bound to obedience; or even conscientiously obliged not to separate from the whole to become independent, or to connect itself with some other state. The people of Lyons, it seems, have refused lately to pay taxes. Why should they not? What lawful authority is there left to exact them? The king imposed some of them. The old states, methodized by orders, settled the more ancient. They may say to the Assembly, Who are you, that are not our kings, nor the states we have elected, nor sit on the principles on which we

have elected you? And who are we, that when we see the gabelles, which you have ordered to be paid, wholly shaken off, when we see the act of disobedience afterwards ratified by yourselves, who are we, that we are not to judge what taxes we ought or ought not to pay, and who are not to avail ourselves of the same powers, the validity of which you have approved in others? To this the answer is, We will send troops. The last reason of kings is always the first with your Assembly. This military aid may serve for a time, whilst the impression of the increase of pay remains, and the vanity of being umpires in all disputes is flattered. But this weapon will snap short, unfaithful to the hand that employs it. The Assembly keep a school, where, systematically, and with unremitting perseverance, they teach principles, and form regulations, destructive to all spirit of subordination, civil and military—and then they expect that they shall hold in obedience an anarchic people by an anarchic army.

The municipal army which, according to their new policy, is to balance this national army, if considered in itself only, is of a constitution much more simple, and in every respect less exceptionable. It is a mere democratic body, unconnected with the crown or the kingdom; armed, and trained, and officered at the pleasure of the districts to which the corps severally belong; and the personal service of the individuals, who compose, or the fine in lieu of personal service, are directed by the same authority.[116] Nothing is more uniform. If, however, considered in any relation to the crown, to the National Assembly, to the public tribunals, or to the other army, or considered in a view to any coherence or connexion between its parts, it seems a monster, and can hardly fail to terminate its perplexed movements in some great national calamity.

116. * I see by M. Necker's account, that the national guards of Paris have received, over and above the money levied within their own city, about £145,000 sterling out of the public treasures. Whether this be an actual payment for the nine months of their existence, or an estimate of their yearly charge, I do not clearly perceive. It is of no great importance, as certainly they may take whatever they please.

It is a worse preservative of a general constitution, than the systasis of Crete, or the confederation of Poland, or any other ill-devised corrective which has yet been imagined, in the necessities produced by an ill-constructed system of government.

Having concluded my few remarks on the constitution of the supreme power, the executive, the judicature, the military, and on the reciprocal relation of all these establishments, I shall say something of the ability showed by your legislators with regard to the revenue.

In their proceedings relative to this object, if possible, still fewer traces appear of political judgment or financial resource. When the states met, it seemed to be the great object to improve the system of revenue, to enlarge its collection, to cleanse it of oppression and vexation, and to establish it on the most solid footing. Great were the expectations entertained on that head throughout Europe. It was by this grand arrangement that France was to stand or fall; and this became, in my opinion, very properly, the test by which the skill and patriotism of those who ruled in that Assembly would be tried. The revenue of the state is the state. In effect all depends upon it, whether for support or for reformation. The dignity of every occupation wholly depends upon the quantity and the kind of virtue that may be exerted in it. As all great qualities of the mind which operate in public, and are not merely suffering and passive, require force for their display, I had almost said for their unequivocal existence, the revenue, which is the spring of all power, becomes in its administration the sphere of every active virtue. Public virtue, being of a nature magnificent and splendid, instituted for great things, and conversant about great concerns, requires abundant scope and room, and cannot spread and grow under confinement, and in circumstances straitened, narrow, and sordid. Through the revenue alone the body politic can act in its true genius and character, and therefore it will display just as much of its collective virtue, and as much of that virtue which may characterize those who move it, and are, as it were, its life and guiding principle, as it is possessed of a just revenue. For from hence not only magnanimity, and liberality, and beneficence, and fortitude, and providence, and the tutelary protection of all good arts, derive their food, and the growth of their organs, but continence, and self-denial, and labour, and vigilance, and frugality, and whatever else there is in which the mind shows itself above the appetite, are nowhere more in their proper element than in the provision and distribution of the public wealth. It is therefore not without reason that the science of speculative and practical finance, which must take to its aid so many auxiliary branches of knowledge, stands high in the estimation not only of the ordinary sort, but of the wisest and best men; and as this science has grown with the progress of its object, the

prosperity and improvement of nations has generally increased with the increase of their revenues; and they will both continue to grow and flourish, as long as the balance between what is left to strengthen the efforts of individuals, and what is collected for the common efforts of the state, bear to each other a due reciprocal proportion, and are kept in a close correspondence and communication. And perhaps it may be owing to the greatness of revenues, and to the urgency of state necessities, that old abuses in the constitution of finances are discovered, and their true nature and rational theory comes to be more perfectly understood; insomuch, that a smaller revenue might have been more distressing in one period than a far greater is found to be in another; the proportionate wealth even remaining the same. In this state of things, the French Assembly found something in their revenues to preserve, to secure, and wisely to administer, as well as to abrogate and alter. Though their proud assumption might justify the severest tests, yet in trying their abilities on their financial proceedings, I would only consider what is the plain, obvious duty of a common finance minister, and try them upon that, and not upon models of ideal perfection.

The objects of a financier are, then, to secure an ample revenue; to impose it with judgment and equality; to employ it economically; and, when necessity obliges him to make use of credit, to secure its foundations in that instance, and for ever, by the clearness and candour of his proceedings, the exactness of his calculations, and the solidity of his funds. On these heads we may take a short and distinct view of the merits and abilities of those in the National Assembly, who have taken to themselves the management of this arduous concern. Far from any increase of revenue in their hands, I find, by a report of M. Vernier, from the committee of finances, of the second of August last, that the amount of the national revenue, as compared with its produce before the Revolution, was diminished by the sum of two hundred millions, or *eight millions sterling* of the annual income, considerably more than one-third of the whole.

If this be the result of great ability, never surely was ability displayed in a more distinguished manner, or with so powerful an effect. No common folly, no vulgar incapacity, no ordinary official negligence, even no official crime, no corruption, no peculation, hardly any direct hostility which we have seen in the modern world, could in so short a time have made so complete an overthrow of the finances, and with them, of the strength of a

great kingdom.—*Cedò quî vestram rempublicam tantam amisistis tam cito?* [117]

The sophisters and declaimers, as soon as the Assembly met, began with decrying the ancient constitution of the revenue in many of its most essential branches, such as the public monopoly of salt. They charged it, as truly as unwisely, with being ill-contrived, oppressive, and partial. This representation they were not satisfied to make use of in speeches preliminary to some plan of reform; they declared it in a solemn resolution or public sentence, as it were judicially, passed upon it; and this they dispersed throughout the nation. At the time they passed the decree, with the same gravity they ordered the same absurd, oppressive, and partial tax to be paid, until they could find a revenue to replace it. The consequence was inevitable. The provinces which had been always exempted from this salt monopoly, some of whom were charged with other contributions, perhaps equivalent, were totally disinclined to bear any part of the burthen, which by an equal distribution was to redeem the others. As to the Assembly, occupied as it was with the declaration and violation of the rights of men, and with their arrangements for general confusion, it had neither leisure nor capacity to contrive, nor authority to enforce, any plan of any kind relative to the replacing the tax or equalizing it, or compensating the provinces, or for conducting their minds to any scheme of accommodation with the other districts which were to be relieved.

The people of the salt provinces, impatient under taxes, damned by the authority which had directed their payment, very soon found their patience exhausted. They thought themselves as skilful in demolishing as the Assembly could be. They relieved themselves by throwing off the whole burthen. Animated by this example, each district, or part of a district, judging of its own grievance by its own feeling, and of its remedy by its own opinion, did as it pleased with other taxes.

We are next to see how they have conducted themselves in contriving equal impositions, proportioned to the means of the citizens, and the least likely to lean heavy on the active capital employed in the generation of that private wealth, from whence the public fortune must be derived. By suffering the several districts, and several of the individuals in each district, to judge of what part of the old revenue they might withhold, instead of better principles of equality, a new inequality was introduced of the most oppressive kind. Payments were regulated by dispositions.

117. “Say, how lost you so great a state so soon?” Roman dramatist Naevius quoted in Cicero, *De senectute,* VI, 20, 15.

The parts of the kingdom which were the most submissive, the most orderly, or the most affectionate to the commonwealth, bore the whole burthen of the state. Nothing turns out to be so oppressive and unjust as a feeble government. To fill up all the deficiencies in the old impositions, and the new deficiencies of every kind which were to be expected, what remained to a state without authority? The National Assembly called for a voluntary benevolence; for a fourth part of the income of all the citizens, to be estimated on the honour of those who were to pay. They obtained something more than could be rationally calculated, but what was far indeed from answerable to their real necessities, and much less to their fond expectations. Rational people could have hoped for little from this their tax in the disguise of a benevolence; a tax weak, ineffective, and unequal; a tax by which luxury, avarice, and selfishness were screened, and the load thrown upon productive capital, upon integrity, generosity, and public spirit —a tax of regulation upon virtue. At length the mask is thrown off, and they are now trying means (with little success) of exacting their benevolence by force.

This benevolence, the ricketty offspring of weakness, was to be supported by another resource, the twin brother of the same prolific imbecility. The patriotic donations were to make good the failure of the patriotic contribution. John Doe was to become security for Richard Roe. By this scheme they took things of much price from the giver, comparatively of small value to the receiver; they ruined several trades; they pillaged the crown of its ornaments, the churches of their plate, and the people of their personal decorations. The invention of these juvenile pretenders to liberty was in reality nothing more than a servile imitation of one of the poorest resources of doting despotism. They took an old huge full-bottomed periwig out of the wardrobe of the antiquated frippery of Louis the Fourteenth, to cover the premature baldness of the National Assembly. They produced this old-fashioned formal folly, though it had been so abundantly exposed in the Memoirs of the Duke de St. Simon, if to reasonable men it had wanted any arguments to display its mischief and insufficiency. A device of the same kind was tried in my memory by Louis the Fifteenth, but it answered at no time. However, the necessities of

ruinous wars were some excuse for desperate projects. The deliberations of calamity are rarely wise. But here was a season for disposition and providence. It was in a time of profound peace, then enjoyed for five years, and promising a much longer continuance, that they had recourse to this desperate trifling. They were sure to lose more reputation by sporting, in their serious situation, with these toys and playthings of finance, which have filled half their journals, than could possibly be compensated by the poor temporary supply which they afforded. It seemed as if those who adopted such projects were wholly ignorant of their circumstances, or wholly unequal to their necessities. Whatever virtue may be in these devices, it is obvious that neither the patriotic gifts, nor the patriotic contribution, can ever be resorted to again. The resources of public folly are soon exhausted. The whole indeed of their scheme of revenue is to make, by any artifice, an appearance of a full reservoir for the hour, whilst at the same time they cut off the springs and living fountains of perennial supply. The account not long since furnished by M. Necker was meant, without question, to be favourable. He gives a flattering view of the means of getting through the year; but he expresses, as it is natural he should, some apprehension for that which was to succeed. On this last prognostic, instead of entering into the grounds of this apprehension, in order, by a proper foresight, to prevent the prognosticated evil, M. Necker receives a sort of friendly reprimand from the president of the Assembly.

As to their other schemes of taxation, it is impossible to say anything of them with certainty; because they have not yet had their operation: but nobody is so sanguine as to imagine they will fill up any perceptible part of the wide gaping breach which their incapacity has made in their revenues. At present the state of their treasury sinks every day more and more in cash, and swells more and more in fictitious representation. When so little within or without is now found but paper, the representative not of opulence but of want, the creature not of credit but of power, they imagine that our flourishing state in England is owing to that bank-paper, and not the bank-paper to the flourishing condition of our commerce, to the solidity of our credit, and to the total exclusion of all idea of power from any part of the transaction. They forget that, in England, not one shilling of paper-money of any description is received but of choice; that the whole has had its origin in cash actually deposited; and that it is convertible at pleasure, in an instant, and without the smallest loss, into cash again. Our paper is of value

in commerce, because in law it is of none. It is powerful on 'Change, because in Westminster Hall it is impotent. In payment of a debt of twenty shillings, a creditor may refuse all the paper of the bank of England. Nor is there amongst us a single public security, of any quality or nature whatsoever, that is enforced by authority. In fact it might be easily shown, that our paper wealth, instead of lessening the real coin, has a tendency to increase it; instead of being a substitute for money, it only facilitates its entry, its exit, and its circulation; that it is the symbol of prosperity, and not the badge of distress. Never was a scarcity of cash, and an exuberance of paper, a subject of complaint in this nation.

Well! but a lessening of prodigal expenses, and the economy which has been introduced by the virtuous and sapient Assembly, make amends for the losses sustained in the receipt of revenue. In this at least they have fulfilled the duty of a financier.—Have those, who say so, looked at the expenses of the National Assembly itself? of the municipalities? of the city of Paris? of the increased pay of the two armies? of the new police? of the new judicatures? Have they even carefully compared the present pension list with the former? These politicians have been cruel, not economical. Comparing the expenses of the former prodigal government and its relation to the then revenues with the expenses of this new system as opposed to the state of its new treasury, I believe the present will be found beyond all comparison more chargeable.[118]

It remains only to consider the proofs of financial ability, furnished by the present French managers when they are to raise supplies on credit. Here I am a little at a stand; for credit, properly speaking, they have none. The credit of the ancient government was not indeed the best; but they could always, on some terms, command money, not only at home, but from most of the countries of Europe where a surplus capital was accumulated; and the credit of that government was improving daily. The establishment of a system of liberty would of course be supposed to give it new strength: and so it would actually have done, if a system of liberty had been established. What offers has their government of pretended liberty had from Holland, from Hamburgh, from Switzerland, from Genoa, from England, for a dealing in their paper?

118. * The reader will observe that I have but lightly touched (my plan demanded nothing more) on the condition of the French finances, as connected with the demands upon them. If I had intended to do otherwise, the materials in my hands for such a task are not altogether perfect. On this subject I

refer the reader to M. de Calonne's work; and the tremendous display that he has made of the havoc and devastation in the public estate, and in all the affairs of France, caused by the presumptuous good intentions of ignorance and incapacity. Such effects those causes will always produce. Looking over that account with a pretty strict eye, and, with perhaps too much rigor, deducting everything which may be placed to the account of a financier out of place, who might be supposed by his enemies desirous of making the most of his cause, I believe it will be found, that a more salutary lesson of caution against the daring spirit of innovators, than what has been supplied at the expense of France, never was at any time furnished to mankind.

Why should these nations of commerce and economy enter into any pecuniary dealings with a people, who attempt to reverse the very nature of things; amongst whom they see the debtor prescribing at the point of the bayonet, the medium of his solvency to the creditor; discharging one of his engagements with another; turning his very penury into his resource; and paying his interest with his rags?

Their fanatical confidence in the omnipotence of church plunder has induced these philosophers to overlook all care of the public estate, just as the dream of the philosopher's stone induces dupes, under the more plausible delusion of the hermetic art, to neglect all rational means of improving their fortunes. With these philosophic financiers, this universal medicine made of church mummy is to cure all the evils of the state. These gentlemen perhaps do not believe a great deal in the miracles of piety; but it cannot be questioned, that they have an undoubting faith in the prodigies of sacrilege. Is there a debt which presses them?—Issue *assignats.* Are compensations to be made, or a maintenance decreed to those whom they have robbed of their freehold in their office, or expelled from their profession?—*Assignats.* Is a fleet to be fitted out?—*Assignats.* If sixteen millions sterling of these *assignats,* forced on the people, leave the wants of the state as urgent as ever—issue, says one, thirty millions sterling of *assignats,*—says another, issue fourscore millions more of *assignats.* The only difference among their financial factions is on the greater or the lesser quantity of *assignats* to be imposed on the public sufferance. They are all professors of *assignats.* Even those, whose natural good sense and knowledge of commerce, not obliterated by philosophy, furnish decisive arguments against this delusion, conclude their arguments, by proposing the emission of *assignats.* I suppose they must talk of *assignats,* as no other language would be understood. All experience of their inefficacy does not in the least discourage them. Are the old *assignats* depreciated at market?—What is the remedy? Issue new *assignats.—Mais si maladia, opiniatria, non*

vult se garire, quid ili facere? assignare—postea assignare; ensuita assignare.[119] The word is a trifle altered. The Latin of your present doctors may be better than that of your old comedy; their wisdom and the variety of their resources are the same. They have not more notes in their song than the cuckoo; though, far from the softness of that harbinger of summer and plenty, their voice is as harsh and as ominous as that of the raven.

119. Lines of dog-Latin that Burke has composed to imitate Molière's *Imaginary Invalid*. Burke's intention is to direct sarcastic humor toward the assignats, the bonds backed by the revenues of confiscated church lands issued by the National Assembly. As Payne explained, "Burke happily compares the ignorance which made the assignat the panacea of the state, to this gross barbarism in the art of medicine." *Burke: Select Works,* 3: 383.

Who but the most desperate adventurers in philosophy and finance could at all have thought of destroying the settled revenue of the state, the sole security for the public credit, in the hope of rebuilding it with the materials of confiscated property? If, however, an excessive zeal for the state should have led a pious and venerable prelate (by anticipation a father of the church[120]) to pillage his own order, and, for the good of the church and people, to take upon himself the place of grand financier of confiscation, and comptroller-general of sacrilege, he and his coadjutors were, in my opinion, bound to show, by their subsequent conduct, that they knew something of the office they assumed. When they had resolved to appropriate to the *Fisc,* a certain portion of the landed property of their conquered country, it was their business to render their bank a real fund of credit, as far as such a bank was capable of becoming so.

To establish a current circulating credit upon any *Land-bank,* under any circumstances whatsoever, has hitherto proved difficult at the very least. The attempt has commonly ended in bankruptcy. But when the Assembly were led, through a contempt of moral, to a defiance of economical, principles, it might at least have been expected, that nothing would be omitted on their part to lessen this difficulty, to prevent any aggravation of this bankruptcy. It might be expected, that, to render your *Land-bank* tolerable, every means would be adopted that could display openness and candour in the statement of the security; everything which could aid the recovery of the demand. To take things in their most favourable point of view, your condition was that of a man of a large landed estate, which he wished to dispose of for the discharge of a debt, and the supply of certain

services. Not being able instantly to sell, you wished to mortgage. What would a man of fair intentions, and a commonly clear understanding, do in such circumstances? Ought he not first to ascertain the gross value of the estate; the charges of its management and disposition; the encumbrances perpetual and temporary of all kinds that affect it; then, striking a net surplus, to calculate the just value of the security? When that surplus (the only security to the creditor) had been clearly ascertained, and properly vested in the hands of trustees; then he would indicate the parcels to be sold, and the time and conditions of sale; after this, he would admit the public creditor, if he chose it, to subscribe his stock into this new fund; or he might receive proposals for an *assignat* from those who would advance money to purchase this species of security.

This would be to proceed like men of business, methodically and rationally; and on the only principles of public and private credit that have an existence.

120. * La Bruyère of Bossuet. [i.e., Jean de la Bruyère]

The dealer would then know exactly what he purchased; and the only doubt which could hang upon his mind would be, the dread of the resumption of the spoil, which one day might be made (perhaps with an addition of punishment) from the sacrilegious gripe of those execrable wretches who could become purchasers at the auction of their innocent fellow-citizens.

An open and exact statement of the clear value of the property, and of the time, the circumstances, and the place of sale, were all necessary, to efface as much as possible the stigma that has hitherto been branded on every kind of Land-bank. It became necessary on another principle, that is, on account of a pledge of faith previously given on that subject, that their future fidelity in a slippery concern might be established by their adherence to their first engagement. When they had finally determined on a state resource from church booty, they came, on the 14th of April, 1790, to a solemn resolution on the subject; and pledged themselves to their country, “that in the statement of the public charges for each year, there should be brought to account a sum sufficient for defraying the expenses of the R.C.A. religion,[121] the support of the ministers at the altars, the relief of the poor, the pensions to the ecclesiastics, secular as well as regular, of the one and of the other sex, *in order that the estates and goods which are at the*

disposal of the nation may be disengaged of all charges, and employed by the representatives, or the legislative body, to the great and most pressing exigences of the state." They further engaged, on the same day, that the sum necessary for the year 1791 should be forthwith determined.

In this resolution they admit it their duty to show distinctly the expense of the above subjects, which, by other resolutions, they had before engaged should be first in the order of provision. They admit that they ought to show the estate clear and disengaged of all charges, and that they should show it immediately. Have they done this immediately, or at any time? Have they ever furnished a rent-roll of the immovable estates, or given in an inventory of the movable effects, which they confiscate to their assignats? In what manner they can fulfil their engagements of holding out to public service, "an estate disengaged of all charges," without authenticating the value of the estate, or the quantum of the charges, I leave it to their English admirers to explain. Instantly upon this assurance, and previously to any one step towards making it good, they issue, on the credit of so handsome a declaration, sixteen millions sterling of their paper. This was manly.

121. R.C.A.—Religion Catholique et Apostolique—The Catholic and Apostolic Religion. This was the term for the Roman Catholic Church in France before the revolution.

Who, after this masterly stroke, can doubt of their abilities in finance?—But then, before any other emission of these financial *indulgences,* they took care at least to make good their original promise!—If such estimate, either of the value of the estate or the amount of the encumbrances, has been made, it has escaped me. I never heard of it.

At length they have spoken out, and they have made a full discovery of their abominable fraud, in holding out the church lands as a security for any debts, or any service whatsoever. They rob only to enable them to cheat; but in a very short time they defeat the ends both of the robbery and the fraud, by making out accounts for other purposes, which blow up their whole apparatus of force and of deception. I am obliged to M. de Calonne for his reference to the document which proves this extraordinary fact; it had by some means escaped me. Indeed it was not necessary to make out my assertion as to the breach of faith on the declaration of the 14th of April, 1790. By a report of their committee it now appears, that the charge of keeping up the reduced ecclesiastical establishments, and other expenses

attendant on religion, and maintaining the religious of both sexes, retained or pensioned, and the other concomitant expenses of the same nature, which they have brought upon themselves by this convulsion in property, exceeds the income of the estates acquired by it in the enormous sum of two millions sterling annually; besides a debt of seven millions and upward. These are the calculating powers of imposture! This is the finance of philosophy! This is the result of all the delusions held out to engage a miserable people in rebellion, murder, and sacrilege, and to make them prompt and zealous instruments in the ruin of their country! Never did a state, in any case, enrich itself by the confiscations of the citizens. This new experiment has succeeded like all the rest. Every honest mind, every true lover of liberty and humanity, must rejoice to find that injustice is not always good policy, nor rapine the high road to riches. I subjoin with pleasure, in a note, the able and spirited observations of M. de Calonne on this subject.[122]

122. * “Ce n’est point à l’assemblée entière que je m’adresse ici; je ne parle qu’à ceux qui l’égarent, en lui cachant sous des gazes séduisantes le but où ils l’entraînent. C’est à eux que je dis: votre objet, vous n’en disconviendrez pas, c’est d’ôter tout espoir au clergé, & de consommer sa ruine; c’est-là, en ne vous soupçonnant d’aucune combinaison de cupidité, d’aucun regard sur le jeu des effets publics, c’est-là ce qu’on doit croire que vous avez en vue dans la terrible opération que vous proposez; c’est ce qui doit en être le fruit. Mais le peuple que vous y intéressez, quel avantage peut-il y trouver? En vous servant sans cesse de lui, que faites vous pour lui? Rien, absolument rien; et, au contraire, vous faites ce qui ne conduit qu’à l’accabler de nouvelles charges.

In order to persuade the world of the bottomless resource of ecclesiastical confiscation, the Assembly have proceeded to other confiscations of estates in offices, which could not be done with any common colour without being compensated out of this grand confiscation of landed property. They have thrown upon this fund, which was to show a surplus, disengaged of all charges, a new charge; namely, the compensation to the whole body of the disbanded judicature; and of all suppressed offices and estates; a charge which I cannot ascertain, but which unquestionably amounts to many French millions. Another of the new charges is an annuity of four hundred and eighty thousand pounds sterling, to be paid (if they choose to keep faith) by daily payments, for the interest of the first assignats.

Vous avez rejeté, à son préjudice, une offre de 400 millions, dont l’acceptation pouvoit devenir un moyen de soulagement en sa faveur; et à cette ressource, aussi profitable que legitime, vous avez

substitué une injustice ruineuse, qui, de votre propre aveu, charge le trésor public, & par conséquent le peuple, d'un surcroît de dépense annuelle de 50 millions au moins, & d'un remboursement de 150 millions.

"Malheureux peuple! voilà ce que vous vaut en dernier résultat l'expropriation de l'Eglise, et la dureté des décrets taxateurs du traitement des ministres d'une religion bienfaisante; & désormais ils seront à votre charge: leurs charités soulageoient les pauvres; et vous allez être imposés pour subvenir à leur entretien!"—*De l'Etat de la France,* p. 81. See also p. 92, and the following pages.

[It is not to the whole assembly that I here address myself; I do not appeal to those who mislead it, hiding under seductive veils the goal to which they draw it. To those I say, your object, which you do not deny, it is to rob the clergy of all hope and to consummate their ruin. This—without rousing suspicion of greedy conspiracy, or intending to gamble with public goods, that is what we must believe you intend in the terrible operation you propose. That is what the fruit of it will be. But the people whom you interest with it, what is to be their advantage? In ceaselessly appealing to their name, what do you do for them? Nothing, absolutely nothing; to the contrary, what you propose will only bring new charges to them. You have rejected to their prejudice an offer of 400 million, the acceptance of which would mean a lighter load. And instead of this legitimate and profitable relief, you have substituted a ruinous injustice, which by your own showing, charges the public treasury and consequently the people, an increased annual expense of at least 50 millions and a subvention of 150.

Unhappy people, here is the final result of the expropriation of the Church and the harshness of the decrees which impose taxes on the beneficent ministers of religion. Henceforth will be on your charge the charity that once cared for the poor which you will be taxed to provide. (Frank M. Turner, trans.)]

Have they ever given themselves the trouble to state fairly the expense of the management of the church lands in the hands of the municipalities, to whose care, skill, and diligence, and that of their legion of unknown under-agents, they have chosen to commit the charge of the forfeited estates, and the consequence of which had been so ably pointed out by the bishop of Nancy?

But it is unnecessary to dwell on these obvious heads of encumbrance. Have they made out any clear state of the grand encumbrance of all, I mean the whole of the general and municipal establishments of all sorts, and compared it with the regular income by revenue? Every deficiency in these becomes a charge on the confiscated estate, before the creditor can plant his cabbages on an acre of church property. There is no other prop than this confiscation to keep the whole state from tumbling to the ground. In this situation they have purposely covered all, that they ought industriously to have cleared, with a thick fog; and then, blindfold themselves, like bulls that shut their eyes when they push, they drive, by the point of the bayonets, their slaves, blindfolded indeed no worse than their lords, to take their fictions for currencies, and to swallow down paper pills by thirty-four millions sterling at a dose. Then they proudly lay in their claim to a future

credit, on failure of all their past engagements, and at a time when (if in such a matter anything can be clear) it is clear that the surplus estates will never answer even the first of their mortgages, I mean that of the four hundred millions (or sixteen millions sterling) of *assignats.* In all this procedure I can discern neither the solid sense of plain dealing, nor the subtle dexterity of ingenious fraud. The objections within the Assembly to pulling up the flood-gates for this inundation of fraud are unanswered; but they are thoroughly refuted by an hundred thousand financiers in the street. These are the numbers by which the metaphysic arithmeticians compute. These are the grand calculations on which a philosophical public credit is founded in France. They cannot raise supplies; but they can raise mobs. Let them rejoice in the applauses of the club at Dundee, for their wisdom and patriotism in having thus applied the plunder of the citizens to the service of the state. I hear of no address upon this subject from the directors of the bank of England; though their approbation would be of a *little* more weight in the scale of credit than that of the club at Dundee. But, to do justice to the club, I believe the gentlemen who compose it to be wiser than they appear; that they will be less liberal of their money than of their addresses; and that they would not give a dog's-ear of their most rumpled and ragged Scotch paper for twenty of your fairest assignats.

Early in this year the Assembly issued paper to the amount of sixteen millions sterling: what must have been the state into which the Assembly has brought your affairs, that the relief afforded by so vast a supply has been hardly perceptible? This paper also felt an almost immediate depreciation of five per cent., which in a little time came to about seven. The effect of these assignats on the receipt of the revenue is remarkable. M. Necker found that the collectors of the revenue, who received in coin, paid the treasury in *assignats.* The collectors made seven per cent. by thus receiving in money, and accounting in depreciated paper. It was not very difficult to foresee, that this must be inevitable. It was, however, not the less embarrassing. M. Necker was obliged (I believe, for a considerable part, in the market of London) to buy gold and silver for the mint, which amounted to about twelve thousand pounds above the value of the commodity gained. That minister was of opinion, that, whatever their secret nutritive virtue might be, the state could not live upon *assignats* alone; that some real silver was necessary, particularly for the satisfaction of those who, having iron in their hands, were not likely to distinguish themselves for patience, when

they should perceive that, whilst an increase of pay was held out to them in real money, it was again to be fraudulently drawn back by depreciated paper. The minister, in this very natural distress, applied to the Assembly, that they should order the collectors to pay in specie what in specie they had received. It could not escape him, that if the treasury paid three per cent. for the use of a currency, which should be returned seven per cent. worse than the minister issued it, such a dealing could not very greatly tend to enrich the public. The Assembly took no notice of his recommendation. They were in this dilemma—If they continued to receive the assignats, cash must become an alien to their treasury: if the treasury should refuse those paper *amulets,* or should discountenance them in any degree, they must destroy the credit of their sole resource. They seem then to have made their option; and to have given some sort of credit to their paper by taking it themselves; at the same time in their speeches they made a sort of swaggering declaration, something, I rather think, above legislative competence; that is, that there is no difference in value between metallic money and their assignats. This was a good, stout, proof article of faith, pronounced under an anathema, by the venerable fathers of this philosophic synod. *Credat* who will—certainly not *Judæus Apella.*[123]

A noble indignation rises in the minds of your popular leaders, on hearing the magic lantern in their show of finance compared to the fraudulent exhibitions of Mr. Law. They cannot bear to hear the sands of his Mississippi compared with the rock of the church, on which they build their system.

123. *Credat* who will—certainly not Judaeus Apella—"The Jew Appell may believe this, not I." Horace, *Satires,* 5, 100, in *The Works of Horace,* C. Smart, trans. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 164.

Pray let them suppress this glorious spirit, until they show to the world what piece of solid ground there is for their assignats, which they have not pre-occupied by other charges. They do injustice to that great, mother fraud, to compare it with their degenerate imitation. It is not true that Law built solely on a speculation concerning the Mississippi. He added the East India trade; he added the African trade; he added the farms of all the farmed revenue of France. All these together unquestionably could not support the structure which the public enthusiasm, not he, chose to build upon these bases. But these were, however, in comparison, generous delusions. They

supposed, and they aimed at, an increase of the commerce of France. They opened to it the whole range of the two hemispheres. They did not think of feeding France from its own substance. A grand imagination found in this flight of commerce something to captivate. It was wherewithal to dazzle the eye of an eagle. It was not made to entice the smell of a mole, nuzzling and burying himself in his mother earth, as yours is. Men were not then quite shrunk from their natural dimensions by a degrading and sordid philosophy, and fitted for low and vulgar deceptions. Above all, remember, that, in imposing on the imagination, the then managers of the system made a compliment to the freedom of men. In their fraud there was no mixture of force. This was reserved to our time, to quench the little glimmerings of reason which might break in upon the solid darkness of this enlightened age.

On recollection, I have said nothing of a scheme of finance which may be urged in favour of the abilities of these gentlemen, and which has been introduced with great pomp, though not yet finally adopted, in the National Assembly. It comes with something solid in aid of the credit of the paper circulation; and much has been said of its utility and its elegance. I mean the project for coining into money the bells of the suppressed churches. This is their alchymy. There are some follies which baffle argument; which go beyond ridicule; and which excite no feeling in us but disgust; and therefore I say no more upon it.

It is as little worth remarking any further upon all their drawing and redrawing, on their circulation for putting off the evil day, on the play between the treasury and the *Caisse d'Escompte,* and on all these old, exploded contrivances of mercantile fraud, now exalted into policy of state. The revenue will not be trifled with. The prattling about the rights of men will not be accepted in payment for a biscuit or a pound of gunpowder. Here then the metaphysicians descend from their airy speculations, and faithfully follow examples. What examples? The examples of bankrupts. But defeated, baffled, disgraced, when their breath, their strength, their inventions, their fancies desert them, their confidence still maintains its ground. In the manifest failure of their abilities, they take credit for their benevolence. When the revenue disappears in their hands, they have the presumption, in some of their late proceedings, to value *themselves* on the relief given to the people. They did not relieve the people. If they

entertained such intentions, why did they order the obnoxious taxes to be paid? The people relieved themselves in spite of the Assembly.

But waving all discussion on the parties who may claim the merit of this fallacious relief, has there been, in effect, any relief to the people in any form? Mr. Bailly, one of the grand agents of paper circulation, lets you into the nature of this relief. His speech to the National Assembly contained a high and laboured panegyric on the inhabitants of Paris, for the constancy and unbroken resolution with which they have borne their distress and misery. A fine picture of public felicity! What! great courage and unconquerable firmness of mind to endure benefits, and sustain redress? One would think from the speech of this learned lord mayor, that the Parisians, for this twelvemonth past, had been suffering the straits of some dreadful blockade; that Henry the Fourth had been stopping up the avenues to their supply, and Sully thundering with his ordnance at the gates of Paris; when in reality they are besieged by no other enemies than their own madness and folly, their own credulity and perverseness. But Mr. Bailly will sooner thaw the eternal ice of his Atlantic regions, than restore the central heat to Paris, whilst it remains "smitten with the cold, dry, petrific mace" of a false and unfeeling philosophy. Some time after this speech, that is, on the thirteenth of last August, the same magistrate, giving an account of his government at the bar of the same Assembly, expresses himself as follows: "In the month of July, 1789," [the period of everlasting commemoration,] "the finances of the city of Paris were *yet* in good order; the expenditure was counter-balanced by the receipt, and she had at that time a million" [forty thousand pounds sterling] "in bank. The expenses which she has been constrained to incur, *subsequent to the Revolution,* amount to 2,500,000 livres. From these expenses, and the great falling off in the product of *the free gifts,* not only a momentary, but a *total,* want of money has taken place." This is the Paris, upon whose nourishment, in the course of the last year, such immense sums, drawn from the vitals of all France, have been expended. As long as Paris stands in the place of ancient Rome, so long she will be maintained by the subject provinces. It is an evil inevitably attendant on the dominion of sovereign democratic republics. As it happened in Rome, it may survive that republican domination which gave rise to it. In that case despotism itself must submit to the vices of popularity. Rome, under her emperors, united the evils of both systems; and this unnatural combination was one great cause of her ruin.

To tell the people that they are relieved by the dilapidation of their public estate, is a cruel and insolent imposition. Statesmen, before they valued themselves on the relief given to the people by the destruction of their revenue, ought first to have carefully attended to the solution of this problem:—Whether it be more advantageous to the people to pay considerably, and to gain in proportion; or to gain little or nothing, and to be disburthened of all contribution? My mind is made up to decide in favour of the first proposition. Experience is with me, and, I believe, the best opinions also. To keep a balance between the power of acquisition on the part of the subject, and the demands he is to answer on the part of the state, is the fundamental part of the skill of a true politician. The means of acquisition are prior in time and in arrangement. Good order is the foundation of all good things. To be enabled to acquire, the people, without being servile, must be tractable and obedient. The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not find the principles of natural subordination by art rooted out of their minds. They must respect that property of which they cannot partake. They must labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice. Of this consolation whoever deprives them, deadens their industry, and strikes at the root of all acquisition as of all conservation. He that does this is the cruel oppressor, the merciless enemy of the poor and wretched; at the same time that by his wicked speculations he exposes the fruits of successful industry, and the accumulations of fortune, to the plunder of the negligent, the disappointed, and the unprosperous.

Too many of the financiers by profession are apt to see nothing in revenue but banks, and circulations, and annuities on lives, and tontines, and perpetual rents, and all the small wares of the shop. In a settled order of the state, these things are not to be slighted, nor is the skill in them to be held of trivial estimation. They are good, but then only good, when they assume the effects of that settled order, and are built upon it. But when men think that these beggarly contrivances may supply a resource for the evils which result from breaking up the foundations of public order, and from causing or suffering the principles of property to be subverted, they will, in the ruin of their country, leave a melancholy and lasting monument of the

effect of preposterous politics, and presumptuous, short-sighted, narrow-minded wisdom.

The effects of the incapacity shown by the popular leaders in all the great members of the commonwealth are to be covered with the "all-atoning name" of liberty. In some people I see great liberty indeed; in many, if not in the most, an oppressive, degrading servitude. But what is liberty without wisdom, and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint. Those who know what virtuous liberty is, cannot bear to see it disgraced by incapable heads, on account of their having high-sounding words in their mouths. Grand, swelling sentiments of liberty I am sure I do not despise. They warm the heart; they enlarge and liberalize our minds; they animate our courage in a time of conflict. Old as I am, I read the fine raptures of Lucan and Corneille with pleasure. Neither do I wholly condemn the little arts and devices of popularity. They facilitate the carrying of many points of moment; they keep the people together; they refresh the mind in its exertions; and they diffuse occasional gaiety over the severe brow of moral freedom. Every politican ought to sacrifice to the graces; and to join compliance with reason. But in such an undertaking as that in France, all these subsidiary sentiments and artifices are of little avail. To make a government requires no great prudence. Settle the seat of power; teach obedience: and the work is done. To give freedom is still more easy. It is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go the rein. But to form a *free government;* that is, to temper together these opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind. This I do not find in those who take the lead in the National Assembly. Perhaps they are not so miserably deficient as they appear. I rather believe it. It would put them below the common level of human understanding. But when the leaders choose to make themselves bidders at an auction of popularity, their talents, in the construction of the state, will be of no service. They will become flatterers instead of legislators; the instruments, not the guides, of the people. If any of them should happen to propose a scheme of liberty, soberly limited, and defined with proper qualifications, he will be immediately outbid by his competitors, who will produce something more splendidly popular. Suspicions will be raised of his fidelity to his cause. Moderation will be stigmatized as the virtue of cowards; and compromise as the prudence of

traitors; until, in hopes of preserving the credit which may enable him to temper, and moderate, on some occasions, the popular leader is obliged to become active in propagating doctrines, and establishing powers, that will afterwards defeat any sober purpose at which he ultimately might have aimed.

But am I so unreasonable as to see nothing at all that deserves commendation in the indefatigable labours of this Assembly? I do not deny that, among an infinite number of acts of violence and folly, some good may have been done. They who destroy everything certainly will remove some grievance. They who make everything new, have a chance that they may establish something beneficial. To give them credit for what they have done in virtue of the authority they have usurped, or which can excuse them in the crimes by which that authority has been acquired, it must appear, that the same things could not have been accomplished without producing such a revolution. Most assuredly they might; because almost every one of the regulations made by them, which is not very equivocal, was either in the cession of the king, voluntarily made at the meeting of the states, or in the concurrent instructions to the orders. Some usages have been abolished on just grounds; but they were such, that if they had stood as they were to all eternity, they would little detract from the happiness and prosperity of any state. The improvements of the National Assembly are superficial, their errors fundamental.

Whatever they are, I wish my countrymen rather to recommend to our neighbours the example of the British constitution, than to take models from them for the improvement of our own. In the former they have got an invaluable treasure. They are not, I think, without some causes of apprehension and complaint; but these they do not owe to their constitution, but to their own conduct. I think our happy situation owing to our constitution; but owing to the whole of it, and not to any part singly; owing in a great measure to what we have left standing in our several reviews and reformations, as well as to what we have altered or superadded. Our people will find employment enough for a truly patriotic, free, and independent spirit, in guarding what they possess from violation. I would not exclude alteration neither; but even when I changed, it should be to preserve. I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building. A politic caution, a guarded

circumspection, a moral rather than a complexional timidity, were among the ruling principles of our forefathers in their most decided conduct. Not being illuminated with the light of which the gentlemen of France tell us they have got so abundant a share, they acted under a strong impression of the ignorance and fallibility of mankind. He that had made them thus fallible, rewarded them for having in their conduct attended to their nature. Let us imitate their caution, if we wish to deserve their fortune, or to retain their bequests. Let us add, if we please, but let us preserve what they have left; and standing on the firm ground of the British constitution, let us be satisfied to admire, rather than attempt to follow in their desperate flights, the aëronauts of France.

I have told you candidly my sentiments. I think they are not likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young; you cannot guide, but must follow the fortune of your country. But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. In the present it can hardly remain; but before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, "through great varieties of untried being," and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood.[124]

I have little to recommend my opinions but long observation and much impartiality. They come from one who has been no tool of power, no flatterer of greatness; and who in his last acts does not wish to belie the tenour of his life. They come from one, almost the whole of whose public exertion has been a struggle for the liberty of others; from one in whose breast no anger durable or vehement has ever been kindled, but by what he considered as tyranny; and who snatches from his share in the endeavours which are used by good men to discredit opulent oppression, the hours he has employed on your affairs; and who in so doing persuades himself he has not departed from his usual office: they come from one who desires honours, distinctions, and emoluments, but little; and who expects them not at all; who has no contempt for fame, and no fear of obloquy; who shuns contention, though he will hazard an opinion: from one who wishes to preserve consistency, but who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end; and, when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it upon one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise.

124. Addison, *Cato,* Act 5, Scene 1.

Rethinking *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

Edmund Burke
Prophet Against the Tyranny of the Politics of Theory

CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN

On November 1, 1790, Edmund Burke published his most famous book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. It is important to get the title right because the book is often referred to as *Reflections on the French Revolution*. The real title much more adequately reveals Burke's intentions. Burke's point, in wording the title as he did, was that this was not just a "French Revolution." Rather, what had commenced in France was a general revolution likely to spread to other countries, as indeed, less than two years after the publication of the *Reflections,* it began to do, through military expansion.

Already, however, well before that period of military expansion, and before Burke began to write his book, the revolution that had opened in France had begun to expand in another way. This was the expansion of ideas, strong sympathy, admiration, and spirit of emulation that by the end of 1789 the various French revolutionary transactions and declarations had aroused in certain circles in other countries, including Britain. Burke wrote his *Reflections* with the deliberate aim of sounding the alarm against this form of revolutionary expansion.

Burke had entertained serious qualms about the French Revolution from the very beginning. He expressed his earliest known thoughts about it in a letter to Lord Charlemont, dated August 9, 1789, in which he wrote of his "thoughts of everything at home" being "suspended by our astonishment at the wonderful sight exhibited in a neighboring and rival country." He pictured "England gazing with astonishment at a French struggle for Liberty and not knowing whether to blame or to applaud!" He thought the revolution had "still something in it paradoxical and Mysterious." He continued more ominously: "The spirit it is impossible not to admire; but

the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner. It is true, that this may be no more than a sudden explosion. . . . But if it should be character rather than accident, then that people are not fit for Liberty, and must have a Strong hand like that of their former masters to coerce them."[1] More than any other contemporary foreign observer, Burke immediately grasped that the events in France embodied a "ferocity" that might well not subject itself to any real control. The character of that ferocity, upon which he seized in its earliest days, never ceases to haunt his thoughts on the course of revolution in France.

Although Burke did not, at any time, approve of the French Revolution, he also did not, during 1789, experience any need to combat it. Burke reached his decision to sound the alarm against the English sympathizers with the revolution in France in the third week of January 1790, when he read a pamphlet containing the proceedings of the Revolution Society on November 4 of the previous year. The Revolution Society was an old, established body, consisting mainly of Protestant Dissenters, and it existed to commemorate the English Revolution of 1688, which had brought William and Mary to the throne. The society met annually on November 4, the birthday of William III. The 1789 meeting of the society was its first since the fall of the Bastille the previous summer, and the participants used the occasion to celebrate and extol the French Revolution. The society's proceedings consisted of a sermon delivered by a well-known politically radical Unitarian Dissenting minister, the Reverend Richard Price; a resolution carried by the society; a dinner enjoyed at the London Tavern; and an address sent to the National Assembly. In the *Reflections,* the part of the proceedings on which Burke concentrates on is the Price sermon. But it was the pamphlet of the Revolution Society proceedings as a whole that inflamed Burke and set him to composing the *Reflections*.

That pamphlet firmly placed the British welcome for the French Revolution in a context of anti-popery. That political context of hostility to Roman Catholicism was a familiar one to English readers because in very considerable measure the English had long defined their national character as distinctly Protestant. Moreover, the Revolution of 1688 had involved the ousting of the Roman Catholic James II, the setting on the throne of his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch Protestant husband William III, and a firm commitment to a permanent Protestant succession. In line with both popular English anti-Catholicism and in commemoration of the

Protestant victory in 1688, the resolution carried by the Revolution Society at the London Tavern on the eve following Price's sermon ran as follows: "This society, sensible of the important advantages arising to this Country by its delivery from Popery and Arbitrary Power, and conscious that, under God, we owe that signal blessing to the Revolution, which sealed our Deliverer, King William the Third, on the Throne; do hereby declare our firm attachment to the civil and religious principles which were recognized and established by that glorious event and which have preserved the succession in the Protestant line; and our determined resolution to maintain and, to the utmost of our power, to perpetuate those blessings to the latest posterity."[2]

On the same occasion that witnessed the adoption of this resolution, Price moved the Congratulatory Address to the National Assembly in Paris, which was duly carried, conveyed to the Assembly, and warmly welcomed there. Thus a society set up to celebrate the Revolution of 1688 was emphasizing the anti-Catholic character of that English Revolution, while welcoming the French Revolution, which had already assumed an anti-Catholic character, notably through the annexation of church property to fund government expenditures.

This particular combination of defending 1688 while attacking Roman Catholicism hurt Burke deeply, for it hit him along a fundamental fault line in his political personality. Burke was a Whig, and thus ex officio committed to the principles of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, including the Protestant succession. But at the same time he was disqualified from sharing the feelings of normal English Whigs toward that Revolution: Burke needed to play down its anti-Catholic elements. When the Revolution Society played up the latter, Burke suffered and needed to strike back.

The source of this deeply felt problem originated in Burke's Irish background. Burke's mother was, and remained all her life, a practicing Catholic, as were her people, the Nagles, a family of Catholic gentry in the Blackwater Valley, County Cork. Burke spent six years of his childhood among the Nagles, and he shared their feelings about the anti-Catholic Penal Code, which the English had imposed on Ireland and which unfavorably governed so many aspects of Irish lives. Burke's father, Richard Burke, was, at least outwardly, a member of the Protestant Established Church of Ireland, in which Edmund was brought up as a member. But Richard Burke, too, may have been a victim of the Penal

Laws, though in a more insidious way. I have reason to believe that Richard had been a Catholic but conformed to the Established Church in order to safeguard his career as an attorney. His son would have been aware of this humiliating sacrifice of conscience in pursuit of career, occasioned only by the presence of the anti-Catholic Penal Code.

Consequently, Edmund Burke's problem with the Glorious Revolution was that while committed to its general principles, which had brought great benefits to Britain, he detested that revolution's most conspicuous and oppressive monument in Ireland, the Penal Code that discriminated so vigorously against Roman Catholics. During his political career Burke had dealt with this very personal problem by seeking to extend the benefits of the Glorious Revolution—the civil and religious liberty that it promised—to Roman Catholics in Britain and Ireland. In this effort Burke had been assisted by the more liberal zeitgeist of the late eighteenth century—the progress of the Enlightenment. Aided by this tendency, Burke had succeeded in masterminding passage of the first measure of Catholic emancipation—the Catholic Relief Act of 1778, which secured property ownership by Roman Catholics. The anti-Catholic reaction that followed that act found its most dramatic expression in the massively destructive Gordon Riots in London during of the summer of 1780. The fanatically anti-Catholic Lord George Gordon, leading thousands of members of the Protestant Association, had publicly blamed Burke for the 1778 measure of Roman Catholic relief against which the rioters were protesting and demanded its repeal. Later in 1780 Burke lost his seat in Parliament for Bristol at least in part because of his efforts on behalf of Roman Catholics.

We can see, therefore, why the proceedings of the English Revolution Society of November 4, 1789, were so repugnant to Edmund Burke. He again saw an English Protestant political society commending violent urban crowd behavior and anti-Catholic legislation—this time, however, not in England but in France. But let me not be misunderstood here. The anti-Catholic elements in the English welcome for the French Revolution do *not* alone constitute "the reason why" Burke was against that revolution. Burke opposed it, on rational grounds, from the beginning, because of his objection to its radical social and political innovations made on grounds of theory. In that respect the *Reflections* has deep roots in Burke's thought. He acted in strict accordance with a principle that he had laid down as early as December 1783 when explaining his initial—and protracted—

unwillingness to attack the system of government of the East India Company. Burke, in that context, explained his "insuperable reluctance to destroy any established system of government, upon a theory."[3] That reluctance is at the root of the *Reflections,* politically speaking. What the proceedings of the Revolution Society accomplished was to enlist Burke's emotions, in addition to his reasoning power, against the French Revolution. The *Reflections* is the fruit of that alliance

On November 4, 1789, Charles-Jean-François Depont (1767–96), a young Parisian acquaintance, wrote Burke the letter to which the *Reflections* was to be, in form, a reply. Depont asked for assurance that "the French are worthy to be free, that they will know how to distinguish liberty from license, and a legitimate government from a despotic power [and] that the Revolution which has begun will succeed." Burke's original response to Depont—later greatly expanded to become the *Reflections*—is mild and judicious in tone, without any of the fierceness of the later version.

In his letter, Depont told Burke that he would never forget that his heart had beaten for the first time at the name of *Liberty* "when I heard you talk about it."[4] Burke takes up this comment with a gentle, stately irony: "Besides as you are pleased to think that your splendid flame of Liberty was first lighted up at My faint and glimmering taper, I thought you had a right to call upon me for my undisguised sentiments on whatever related to that Subject." Burke then asked permission "to continue our conversation" and to tell his friend "what the freedom is that I love and that to which I think all men entitled." He then explained, "It is not solitary, unconnected, individual, selfish Liberty. As if every Man was to regulate the whole of his Conduct by his own will. The Liberty I mean is social freedom. It is that state of things in which Liberty is secured by the equality of Restraint; A Constitution of things in which the liberty of no one Man and no body of Men and no Number of men can find Means to trespass on the liberty of any Person or any description of Persons in the Society."

Such liberty, Burke maintained, was "but another name for Justice, ascertained by wise Laws, and secured by well constructed institutions," adding that "whenever a separation is made between Liberty and Justice, neither is, in my opinion, safe." He continued that he would be pleased with the situation in France and presumably stand assured that the French really did enjoy liberty when he had learned that "in France, the Citizen, by whatever description he is qualified, is in a perfect state of legal security,

with regard to his life, to his property, to the uncontrolled disposal of his Person, to the free use of his Industry and his faculties," and when he was further "assured, that a simple Citizen *may* decently express his sentiments upon Publick Affairs, without hazard to his life or safety, even then against a predominant and fashionable opinion."

Burke then turned to one of his favorite themes as he addressed his young friend about his own future in revolutionary times. He noted, "You are now to live in a new order of things; under a plan of Government of which no Man can speak from experience." Depont, who was about to come into his own property, would have "fair pretensions to a considerable share" in the new political and social order. But Burke thought stability was not yet at hand. He told the young man, "The French may be yet to go through more transmigrations. They may pass, as one of our Poets says, 'thro' many varieties of untried being' before their State obtains its final form." Burke warned him that "in that progress thro' Chaos and darkness" he would "find it necessary (at all times it is more or less so) to fix Rules to keep *your* life and Conduct in some steady course." Emphasizing that the French had "theories enough concerning the Rights of Men," he thought it not "amiss to add a small degree of attention to their Nature and disposition." He advised Depont, "It is with Man in the concrete, it is with common human life and human Actions you are to be concerned." Admitting that his thoughts were "not in the taste of this enlighten'd age" and were "no better than the late ripe fruit of mere experience," Burke concluded, "Never wholly separate in your Mind the merits of any Political Question from the Men who are concerned in it. You will be told, that if a measure is good, what have you [to] do with the Character and views of those who bring it forward. But designing Men never separate their Plans from their Interests; and if You assist them in their Schemes, You will find the pretended good in the end thrown aside or perverted, and the interested object alone compassed, and that perhaps thro' Your means. The power of bad Men is no indifferent thing."

Burke throughout this letter pointed his young correspondent to the importance of experience and concrete circumstance over theory. Part of the concrete circumstance that in his view must receive consideration was the issue of human character itself. For Burke no amount of high-flown or even well-intended abstract theory could overcome the concrete circumstance of "the power of bad Men." In this regard, Burke's brief last sentence to

Depont can be understood not only as applying to the age of the French Revolution but also as echoing with equally haunting prescience down the next two centuries of the history of world revolutions.

Although the *Reflections* began as a reply to Depont's request for reassurance regarding the future course of the French Revolution, which Burke could not in good conscience provide, the *Reflections* as published was very different, in character and tone, from that original reply to his Paris correspondent. What intervened was Burke's having learned of the proceedings of the Revolution Society in London, which had expressed unrestricted admiration for the French Revolution and further implied a desire to emulate it in England. Burke felt great alarm and anger over those proceedings, and having denounced them in the Commons, in February 1790, he set out to write a tract, to warn the British public against the dangers of any such tendencies. That tract, in the form of a letter, is the *Reflections.* It resembles George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in two important ways. Both books were written about a revolution in another country and its consequences, and both were directed against British sympathizers with that revolution, and intended to isolate them.

His passionate indignation against the French Revolution—and above all against any attempt to imitate it in the British Isles—sustains the *Reflections* and is a fundamental source of a part of its power. The passion of his indictment has been used in attempts to discredit the work. There is to be sure an emotional undercurrent throughout, but it breaks through to the surface only rarely. When it does, the resultant rhetoric is spectacular. The most spectacular such passage—that about the queen of France, as Burke saw her in 1773—has been quoted far more often than anything else in the book. All too frequent repetition of this quotation has created the misleading impression that *Reflections* consists mostly of gorgeous rhetoric. There is, in reality, very little rhetoric, quantitatively speaking. The text runs just over 200 pages. I reckon that almost 90 percent of that is taken up with argument and analysis. Most of the book, in point of fact, is made up of plain, cogent argument. Passion is present, but Burke keeps it well under control, except on the rare occasions when he decides not to do so.

The grand distinguishing feature of the *Reflections* is, however, that passionate as well as rational power of Burke's insight into the character of the French Revolution, then at an early stage. Reading the *Reflections* in the 1960s with an undergraduate class in New York, I found that my students

assumed that the direst events of the revolution—the September Massacres, the Terror, the executions of the king and queen—had already taken place when Burke wrote the *Reflections.* In fact, those events all lay in the future, both when the *Reflections* was written and when it was published. And yet there is a sense in which those events are already present in the *Reflections.* They are present in the sense of the ferocious dynamic that Burke ascribes to the revolution, even in 1790, long before it became visible to the world through those violent events of 1792–94.

Burke's insight is so acute as to endow his prose with prophetic power. He saw the way the revolution was heading as no on else seems to have done at the time. The spring and summer of 1790—the period in which Burke wrote the *Reflections*—was the most tranquil stage, in appearance, in the history of the revolution. It was a period of constitution-making, of benevolent rhetoric, and of peaceful jubilation, as in the *Déclaration de Paix au Monde* (May 21) or in the *Fête de la Fédération* (July 14), celebrating the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Many observers and participants both believed and hoped that the violent turmoil that had marked the summer and fall of 1789 was a thing of the past and that a transition to a stable constitutional monarchy would take place.

In the spring and summer of 1790, most people seem to have assumed that the French Revolution had *already taken place* and that all that remained was to reap its benign consequences. Burke, however, sensed that the revolution was only beginning. In the penultimate paragraph of the *Reflections* he warned that the French "commonwealth" could hardly remain in the form it had taken in 1790. Recurring to the language of his earlier letter to Depont, he urged that "before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, 'through great varieties of untried being,' and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood" (210).

Burke did not merely foresee future transmigrations, fire, and blood in France in 1790. He also foresaw that those transmigrations would conclude in military despotism. He related that prediction to his criticism of the structure of the French National Assembly, which would soon conclude its constitutional life and make way for a new legislature provided in the constitution it had written but in which none of the members of the National Assembly were to be allowed to sit. Late in the *Reflections,* he observed, "It is known, that armies have hitherto yielded a very precarious and uncertain obedience to any senate, or popular authority; and they will least of all yield

it to an assembly which is to have only a continuance of two years." He predicted that military officers would "totally lose the characteristic disposition of military men, if they see with perfect submission and due admiration, the dominion of pleaders" and most especially "when they find, that they have a new court to pay to an endless succession of those pleaders, whose military policy, and genius of whose command, (if they should have any,) must be as uncertain as their duration is transient." With both weakness and fluctuation of authority, army officers, Burke predicted, "will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself." Thereafter, the armies would "obey him on his personal account." At that point, Burke declared, "The person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your Assembly, the master of your whole republic" (186). The seizure of power by Napoleon Bonaparte—the very kind of event predicted in this remarkable passage—occurred on 18Brumaire (November 9) 1799, nine years after the publication of the *Reflections,* and more than two years after the death of the author.

Burke's astonishing capacity to see into the ways in which events were moving derived not from any mystical intuition but from penetrating powers of observation, judicious inference from what was observed, and thorough analysis of what was discerned by observation and inference. Burke had immense respect for *circumstances,* and he observed them with proportionate attentiveness. There is a passage about circumstances, in relation to liberty, very near the beginning of the *Reflections*; it is fundamental to Burke's political thinking not only in the *Reflections* but generally: "Circumstances (which with some gentlemen pass for nothing) give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind" (7). Burke more than other observer understood that the circumstances that the National Assembly had fostered in France were inherently unstable and that in such circumstances various groups would vie for power, and that in the end it would be the military who would eventually seize power from feckless politicians who themselves paid little attention to circumstances and embraced only a politics of theory.

The power of Burke's insight amounting to prophecy continued to manifest itself in his post-*Reflections* commentary on the revolution in France. His remarks on the future of the monarchy proved especially penetrating. The constitution promulgated by the French National Assembly established Louis XVI as a constitutional monarch, a situation that he accepted only with much reluctance and eventually found untenable. In the middle of June 1791, Louis and his family attempted to flee France but were captured at Varennes. Thereafter, virtually everyone in France understood that the constitutional monarchy was unsustainable because the monarch really did not believe in the constitution.

In January 1791, almost six months before the pivotal event of the so-called flight to Varennes, Burke wrote his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly.* This *Letter,* which is essentially a postscript to the *Reflections,* contains two striking examples of Burke's powers of predictive insight. At a time of no apparent threat to Louis XVI in person, Burke predicted his execution. Although the king was not guillotined until January 21, 1793, Burke pointed to its possibility almost exactly two years earlier. In the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly,* dated January 19, 1791, Burke described what he believed must necessarily flow from the actions and ambitions of the revolutionary leadership. He believed that the French monarchy itself would eventually be overthrown to make way for a republic when the revolutionary leaders no longer needed either the king or the queen. Pointing to "a design," which those leaders "have long since entertained," Burke declared,

> In spite of their solemn declarations, their soothing addresses, and the multiple oaths which they have taken, and forced others to take, they will assassinate the king when his name will no longer be necessary to their designs; but not a moment sooner. They will probably first assassinate the queen, whenever the renewed menace of such assassination loses its effect upon the anxious mind of an affectionate husband. At present, the advantage which they derive from the daily threats against her life, is her only security for preserving it. They keep their sovereign alive for the purpose of exhibiting him, like some wild beast at a fair, as if they had a Bajazet in a cage. They chose to make monarchy contemptible by exposing it to derision, in the person of the most benevolent of their kings.[5]

It is worth noting that—if we equate the guillotining of Louis and Marie Antoinette with assassination, as Burke certainly would have done—he is right about the only event which he actually predicts: the assassination of the king. He also foresees (without specifically predicting) the execution of

the queen. He is wrong only about something of which he spoke in terms of probability: the order of the two assassinations. Marie Antoinette was not guillotined until October 16, 1793.

Burke's capacity to predict certain events—intensification of revolution, execution of king and queen, emergence of military despotism—came from his early and profound insight into the general character and tendencies of the revolution. In matters of timing and tactics, long-distance prediction was impossible. Burke knew Marie Antoinette was much more unpopular than Louis was, and he therefore naturally assumed that she would be killed first. What he could not foresee in early 1791 was that the king would be singled out, in late 1792, for execution first, because he was relatively popular. Thus the threat to him would draw the *indulgents*—the relative "soft-liners" among the revolutionaries—to try to save him, so leading to their own destruction and to the ascent of men like Robespierre to the supreme power, by means of the compromising of his greatest rival. As Michelet was to write, "They were aiming at Danton, through the King."[6]

Burke could not foresee the tactics that Robespierre—little known outside France in early 1791—would pursue in late 1792. But he did foresee, and clearly predicted in the *Letter to a Member,* the rise to power, within the revolution, of people of the Robespierre type, who would oust the "moderates" who held the leadership of the Assembly in 1789–91. Burke writes of those who called themselves the moderates:

> These, if I conceive rightly of their conduct, are a set of men who approve heartily of the whole new constitution, but wish to lay heavy on [i.e., to distance themselves from] the most atrocious of those crimes, by which this fine constitution of their's has been obtained. They are a sort of people who affect to proceed as if they thought that men may deceive without fraud, rob without injustice, and overturn every thing without violence. They are men who would usurp the government of their country with decency and moderation. In fact they are nothing more or better, than men engaged in desperate designs, with feeble minds. They are not honest; they are only ineffectual and unsystematic in their iniquity. They are persons who want not the dispositions, but the energy and vigour, that is necessary for great evil machinations. They find that in such designs they fall at best into a secondary rank, and others take the place and lead in usurpation, which they are not qualified to obtain or to hold. . . . But these men naturally are despised by those who have heads to know, and hearts that are able to go through the necessary demands of bold, wicked enterprizes. They are naturally classed below the latter description, and will only be used by them as inferior instruments. They will be only the Fairfaxes of your Cromwells.[7]

Burke here predicts in January 1791 the transit of power, within the revolution, that would come about in the second half of 1792. And it was

this transit, of course, that led directly to what Burke had also foreseen: the execution/assassination of the king and queen of France.

In 1796, Burke offered his last extensive commentary on the revolution in France in a series of *Letters on a Regicide Peace,* only two of which were published before his death. Burke's goal in these letters was to dissuade Prime Minister William Pitt from concluding a peace treaty with France. By this time, the reign of terror in France had ended and Robespierre had himself been executed. Some people in Britain believed the moment was opportune to end the war with France that had begun in 1792. Burke took a very different view.

In the first of the *Letters on a Regicide Peace,* headed "On the Overtures of Peace," Burke correctly predicts a long war, stating, "We are not at an end of our struggle, nor near it. Let us not deceive ourselves: we are at the beginning of great troubles." Only through an extended struggle could so dangerous a power as France be reduced "to measure or to reason." He then stresses that Britain is engaged "in a war of a *peculiar* nature" that was not "with an ordinary community, which is hostile or friendly as passion or as interest may veer about—not with a state which makes war through wantonness, and abandons it through lassitude." Rather, he urges, "We are at war with a system which by its essence is inimical to all other governments, and which makes peace or war as peace and war may best contribute to their subversion. It is with an *armed doctrine* that we are at war." That "armed doctrine" allowed the war to spread in unpredictable ways because the doctrine, Burke argues, "has, by its essence, a faction of opinion and of interest and of enthusiasm in every country." He portrays it as "a Colossus which bestrides our Channel" with "one foot on a foreign shore, the other upon the British soil." If that Colossus "can at all exist, it must finally prevail." Burke concluded that nothing could "so completely ruin any of the old governments, our's in particular, as the acknowledgment, directly or by implication, of any kind of superiority in this new power." Consequently, the British government must not "in a bad or doubtful situation of our affairs" seek peace with France on terms that were not of its own choosing.[8]

Burke's thesis of an armed doctrine was open to serious question in the post-Thermidorian period about which he was writing. As Burke himself also noted, in the first of his *Letters on a Regicide Peace,* the Thermidorians had apostasized from most of the doctrines that had earlier been sacred to

the revolutionaries. Insofar as there was any "doctrine" guiding the destinies of post-Thermidorian France, it was the doctrine proclaimed by Bonaparte to his troops in Italy: the doctrine of "honour, glory and riches." If that could be classified as a doctrine, it was certainly an armed one, and one of terrifying efficiency. Burke was right to see that post-Thermidorian France remained a manically expansionist power with which peace could not be concluded without total submission. Pitt's assumption that the Directory was a normal government, with which business could be done, was unfounded, as Pitt would find out for himself.

Burke draws his conclusions about the abnormality of even the post-Thermidorean French government from its roots in regicide—the execution of the king three years earlier. Burke argues that the leaders of this "Republic of Regicide" cannot even discuss peace without sowing the "seeds of tumult and sedition," for "they never have abandoned, and never will they abandon, in peace, in war, in treaty, in any situation, or for one instant, their old, steady maxim of separating the people from their government." Then Burke gives us one of his last great set pieces: the picture of the royal ambassadors from the various courts of Europe attending the regicide levee:

> To those who do not love to contemplate the fall of human greatness, I do not know a more mortifying spectacle than to see the assembled majesty of the crowned heads of Europe waiting as patient suitors in the antechamber of Regicide. They wait, it seems, until the sanguinary tyrant Carnot shall have snorted away the fumes of the undigested blood of his sovereign. Then, when, sunk on the down of usurped pomp, he shall have sufficiently indulged his meditations with what monarch he shall next glut his ravening maw, he may condescend to signify that it is his pleasure to be awake, and that he is at leisure to receive the proposals of his high and mighty clients for the terms on which he may respite the execution of the sentence he has passed upon them. At the opening of those doors, what a sight it must be to behold the plenipotentiaries of royal impotence, in the precedency which they wilt intrigue to obtain, and which will be granted to them according to the seniority of their degradation, sneaking into the Regicide presence, and, with the relics of the smile which they had dressed up for the levee of their masters still flickering on their curled lips, presenting the faded remains of their courtly graces, to meet the scornful, ferocious, sardonic grin of a bloody ruffian, who, whilst he is receiving their homage, is measuring them with his eye, and fitting to their size the slider of his guillotine.[9]

Here as elsewhere in his critique of the revolution Burke is determined to demonstrate that what is at work first in France and then in international relations is not any kind of politics as usual. A vast transformation in political values and morality has transpired since 1789, a transformation

that British leaders must recognize as rendering impossible any kind of usual peace negotiations.

In the second of the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* Burke goes to great lengths to indicate why the leaders of France differ from other figures on the international landscape.

> Whatever were the first motives to the war among politicians, they saw that in its spirit, and for its object, it was a *civil war;* and as such they pursued it. It is a war between the partisans of the ancient civil, moral, and political order of Europe against a sect of fanatical and ambitious atheists which means to change them all. It is not France extending a foreign empire over other nations: it is a sect aiming at universal empire, and beginning with the conquest of France. The leaders of that sect secured *the center of Europe;* and that secured, they knew, that, whatever might be the event of battles and sieges, their *cause* was victorious.

Returning to the themes of his *Reflections,* Burke roots this new politics in the actions of French philosophers whom he claims "had one predominant object, which they pursued with a fanatical fury,—that is, the utter extirpation of religion." Burke further urged, "This fanatical atheism left out, we omit the principal feature in the French Revolution, and a principal consideration with regard to the effects to be expected from a peace with it."[10]

In 1756 in an earlier publication, *A Vindication of Natural Society,* Burke had foreseen how the discrediting of religion would in effect condemn the established social and political system of that European country where the discredit of religion had been pushed to the greatest lengths. That country was France. The discredit of religion in his view automatically discredited the monarchy, since reverence for the monarch—His most Christian Majesty—rested essentially on the theory that the monarch was God's anointed. If there was not a God who personally intervened in human politics, then the monarchy was a fraud. The monarch was delegitimized by being desacralized, and the way was laid open for his deposition and execution. Burke had returned to that theme in the *Reflections,* and at the very end of his life, forty years after first enunciating it, he drove the analysis home in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.

Throughout the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* Burke denounces the manner in which the French revolutionaries, whom he alternatively calls Jacobins and Atheists, have turned the manners and moral expectations of the age topsy-turvy. Through that insight Burke intended to show how they had played havoc with the very roots of public behavior by overturning

private morality. Burke reminds his readers: “Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and color to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.” The French had been deeply aware of this relationship, and consequently in Burke’s view “they settled a system of manners, the most licentious, prostitute, and abandoned that ever has been known, and at the same time most coarse, rude, savage, and ferocious.” In the process, “The noblest passions, the love of glory, the love of country, have been debauched into means of its preservation and its propagation.” He cites instances of women calling for the blood of their children whom they accused of being royalists, and fathers seeking to demonstrate their patriotism by demanding the sacrifice of their sons, and children demanding the deaths of their parents. He claims, “The foundation of their republic is laid in moral paradoxes.” Summarizing his objection to Jacobin morality in one sentence, Burke writes, “They think everything unworthy of the name of public virtue, unless it indicates violence on the private.”[11]

The best succinct definition of Burke’s position on the French Revolution is that of Philippe Raynaud: “A la fois libérale et contre-révolutionnaire . . . .”[12] To many English-speaking readers the juncture of the terms “liberal” and “counterrevolutionary” would have something shocking about it. It seems to be widely assumed, in most circles to the left of center, that a true liberal must be sympathetic, if not necessarily to all revolutions, at least to the French one, whose intellectual origins were in the later Enlightenment and whose most memorable rhetoric is resolutely liberal. Yet surely there is validity, from a liberal point of view, in the Burkean distinction between limited revolutions, like England’s Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution, and limitless, totally innovative ones, like the revolution in France, which claim to extend the boundaries of liberty but in fact result in successive mutations of despotism.

From today’s perspective, we can best see Burke’s writings against the French Revolution as the first great act of intellectual resistance to the first great experiment in totalitarian innovation. That first experiment failed and turned into military despotism, as Burke had predicted it would. Yet it left

behind a memory of spectacular events, of drama, of rhetoric, of glory, of a sublime vision of what society might be, once the rule of *les purs* had been substituted for that of *les corrompus* (Robespierre's terms). There was matter there for emulation, and the emulators have not been lacking.

The first and most durable emulators were the Marxists. Marx and Engels, and later Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin, had all the qualities that Burke abhorred in the French Revolutionaries: radical repudiation of all existing institutions and arrangements; absolute confidence in their own competence to build a new and far better society; willingness to kill their contemporaries in great numbers for the supposed benefit of posterity; contemptuous hostility to all religion, and a program for its enforced elimination from the world.

The continuity of Marxism with the French Revolutionary tradition is generally no more than implicit. Marx was concerned with asserting his own originality, and not with acknowledging indebtedness to predecessors. Yet the continuity is there, and nowhere more apparent than in Marx's venomous hostility to Edmund Burke. Accounting for the latter's behavior in a footnote to *Capital,* Marx enthusiastically adopted the venality theory, so dear to Burke's hostile contemporaries, the English pro-Jacobins, and to some later historians: "The sycophant—who in the pay of the English oligarchy played the romantic *laudator temporis acti* against the French Revolution just as, in the pay of the North American colonies at the beginning of the American troubles, he had played the liberal against the English oligarchy—was an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois."[13]

In the main body of Marxist writing, the continuity with the French Revolution is implied by a claim to *surpass* that revolution. Marx had already, in his own opinion and in that of his followers, surpassed the French Revolution by laying, in *Capital,* the scientific basis that the earlier revolutionaries had lacked. Also, the Marxist revolution, when it came, would be inherently superior to the French one, since it would, according to Marx, be a proletarian revolution, whereas the French had been a bourgeois one. So much for the theory of the thing. In reality the resemblance between the Marxists and their French predecessors was very close indeed, and where they differed most obviously—which was in point of originality—the French had the advantage. The French were the first to have the audacity to attempt to reconstruct an entire system of government "upon a theory." The French were therefore the grand pioneers in the domain of universal

innovation; the Marxists were the second wave, with precedents to work on, and to analyze, criticize, and "surpass."

And the Marxists did indeed surpass the Jacobins in that they went further down the road of radical innovation than their predecessors had done. With two major exceptions, the French revolutionaries had respected private property. (The two exceptions were the nationalization of church property in October 1789, and the systematic looting of "liberated" foreign territories, after the outbreak of the European War, in April 1792.) The Marxists, in contrast, decreed the systematic abolition of private property. This enormous innovation heralded a correspondingly great extension of the powers wielded by the revolutionary leaders over their subjects-to-be. From a Burkean point of view, this meant that the heirs of the Jacobins represented a more virulent strain than that which Burke, in his lifetime, had had to combat. Different strains, but the same disease.

The Marxist intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries talked in terms of different concepts from those used by the French revolutionaries, but in their character and style the new Jacobins were clones of the old ones. The Marxists talked a lot about the proletariat and assigned a high value, in theory, to its historic role. In practice, the proletariat was to supply the troops that would put the Marxists into possession of absolute power. And the Marxists were famously not themselves members of the proletariat but exceptionally aggressive and arrogant intellectuals; in those qualities they were exactly like the people who led the French Revolution, in all its phases.

The role of the proletariat, within the Marxist system, corresponds closely to the role of Rousseau's General Will within the French Revolution. For the French revolutionaries of all tendencies, Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* was authoritative, and the General Will, the key concept of that work, became a kind of tutelary deity of the revolution. Like other deities, the General Will is an elusive and inscrutable supreme authority. As Rousseau says: "The General Will is always right (*droite*) but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened." So Rousseau, in chapters VI and VII of *Du Contrat Social,* appoints to the service of the General Will a personage variously described as a guide or legislator. It is the guide's job, in Rousseau's words, to show the General Will how "to see objects as they are, sometimes as they ought to appear to it." Robespierre was precisely such a guide.

The General Will was the supreme authority but was liable to error, and it required the services of the guide to make its purposes clear. Marx's proletariat possesses precisely the same combination of characteristics. This combination is without parallel, except in contexts that are avowedly supernatural. The combination is no accident but rather a measure of Marx's indebtedness to the Jacobin tradition and to its moral and intellectual master. That continuity is evident not only in concepts but also in style. Rousseau had shown the world the power of confident and peremptory affirmation, untrammeled by any care for evidence. Marx, in his most popular and influential writings—notably The *Communist Manifesto*—followed the same pitch. Later, in *Capital,* he assembled a vast body of "evidence" around a predetermined conclusion. But the "evidence" was accepted only by those who had already yielded to the peremptory affirmations.

The continuity between French revolutionary practice and Marxist practice became apparent after the Bolsheviks had seized power in the Russian Empire. The Bolsheviks, from the beginning of their enterprise, had placed their fight in the tradition of the French Revolution and of the Paris Commune of 1871, the latter an episode within the same tradition. It is reported that when Lenin and his group of returning revolutionary exiles were on the way to the Finland Station in 1917, they burst into song when their train crossed the Russian frontier. The song they sang was *La Marseillaise*.

The Russian Communists surpassed their French predecessors in the extent and duration of the terror they practiced. Although terror, as Burke saw, underlay the whole of the French Revolution, what historians call the Terror—that is the terror associated with the name of Robespierre—lasted less than two years, from the summer of 1792 to the summer of 1794. Leaving aside the period of both Red and White Terror in the Russian Civil Wars, Stalin's terror lasted in varying forms from 1934 to 1941 and was renewed for a further eight years from the end of the war in Europe until Stalin's death in 1953. The number of the victims also expanded hugely. The victims of Robespierre and his associates numbered in the tens of thousands, but Stalin's victims numbered in the millions, as also were the victims of the Chinese Communists, together with those of Pol Pot in Cambodia.

The scale of the terror appears proportionate to the scale of the innovation attempted. The French Revolution, inside France, practiced only limited incursions on property, mainly church property and that of émigrés. Twentieth-century Communist revolutions were not confined to politics and religion but were also revolutions in property relations, and so they encountered far wider and deeper resistance, necessitating far greater terror. Stalin's terror began with the enforcement of rural collectivism. It greatly exceeded the French terror in scope, but it had a close precedent, of which Stalin was certainly aware, within the French Revolution. The Jacobins, in 1793–94, sent portable guillotines to the villages to terrorize the villagers into parting with their grain, for which they received almost worthless *assignats*. Stalin's 1936 constitution was completely in the French revolutionary tradition, both in its copious use of benevolent and liberal formulas and in the total irrelevance of these formulas to actual revolutionary practice.

In style also, and in moral exigence, the Russian and Chinese revolutions took after the French one. Show trials were part of the machinery of government, and so were other rituals designed to show the supremacy of state morality. Burke had been particularly disgusted by the Jacobins' staging of public performances in which children denounced their parents, or parents their children, as traitors to the revolution. Such performances, and multiple variations on them, became routine under the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

Under the Communists, as under the Jacobins, professions of "public virtue" were used to suppress the practice of all the "private virtues" hitherto honored by ordinary human beings. The point here is that it was the French Revolution that set the precedent for the later and even more terrible efforts at changing whole societies "upon a theory." In resisting that effort in his own time, Burke was also warning future generations against similar efforts.

The Communists were the direct heirs of the Jacobins. The debt of the other great revolution of the twentieth century, the National Socialist one, is far from being so obvious, yet it exists. In principle, Hitler rejected the French Revolution, partly because it was French and partly because its rhetoric—though not its practice—reflected those Enlightenment values that Hitler rejected *in toto*. And Hitler rose to power as a result of his streetwise effectiveness as a populist anti-Communist. Nonetheless, there

were two aspects of the French and Russian revolutions that could not fail to attract Hitler's attention and arouse his emulation. The first was the audacity of innovations on the scale attempted by those two revolutions. The second was the ferocity with which the two sets of revolutionaries repressed all efforts at resistance to their innovations.

National Socialism descended from, and went further than, the *völkisch* tradition of nineteenth-century Germany. The völkisch ideal, known as *Volkstum,* was nationalist, anti-Semitic, racist, and militarist. It was also revolutionary. Following the first German attempt at revolution, in 1848, Richard Wagner wrote: "The Revolution, redeemer and creator of a new world blessing . . . I, the Revolution, am the ever-rejuvenating, ever-fashioning Life . . . For I am Revolution, I am the ever-fashioning Life, I am the only God . . . The incarnated Revolution, the God become Man . . . proclaiming to all the world the new Gospel of Happiness."[14]

Wagner was völkisch to the core, and his apocalyptic revolution would have been militantly anti-Semitic and racist, as is clear from his *Das Judentum in der Musik,* published in 1850. The German revolutionaries of 1848 had their heads full of an intoxicating mixture of French revolutionary mystique and völkisch ideas. The abortive 1848 revolution thus represents a stage in the transition and mutation of revolutionary ideas between France and Germany. The National Socialist Revolution of 1933–45 was the culmination of that process. As Heine had written, already before 1848: "A drama will be enacted in Germany in comparison with which the French Revolution will appear a harmless idyll."[15]

The Third Reich was the most far-reaching effort ever made in reconstructing human society "upon a theory." The theory was that of "racial hygiene," and the Holocaust was an application of that theory. The Holocaust would have been replicated on a worldwide scale had the outcome of World War II permitted continued and expanded application of the theory. The particular theory adopted by the National Socialists owes nothing to the French Revolution. What the French Revolution, and its legitimate descendant, the Russian Revolution, provided for Hitler was not theory, but example: the greatest examples in all history, before Hitler, of the recasting of societies "upon a theory." Hitler despised their particular theories, but he followed their examples—and hugely surpassed them—in the audacity and ferocity with which he applied his own particular "theoretick dogma."

The course and consequences of the three great revolutions of the twentieth century, as well as lesser ones begotten by them, confirmed on an awesome scale Burke's warnings against attempts to reconstruct whole societies "upon a theory."

Notes

This essay is based on the author's analysis of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and other discussions of the French Revolution as originally published in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

1. Edmund Burke to Lord Charlemont, August 9, 1789, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke,* Thomas Copeland, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958–78), 6: 10.

2. Quoted in O'Brien, *Great Melody,* 395.

3. Quoted in ibid., 321.

4. For the entire correspondence quoted in the next two paragraphs, see *Correspondence of Edmund Burke,* 6: 39–50.

5. Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly,* in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke,* F. W. Raffety, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 4: 294.

6. Quoted in O'Brien, *Great Melody,* 438.

7. Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly,* 4: 320–21.

8. Edmund Burke, *Letters on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France,* in *Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke,* 6: 91, 99.

9. Ibid., 6: 89, 100, 106.

10. Ibid., 6: 179, 192, 193.

11. Ibid., 4: 149–51.

12. Preface to the modern French edition of *Réflections sur la Révolution de France* (Paris: Ohachette, 1989), lvi.

13. Marx quoted in O'Brien, *Great Melody,* 597.

14. Wagner quoted in Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 234, 238.

15. Heine quoted in ibid., 164.

Edmund Burke and the Literary Cabal
A Tale of Two Enlightenments

DARRIN M. MCMAHON

Edmund Burke was an enlightened man. He believed in the disciplined power of reason, in the tolerance of religious opinion, and in "a slow but well-sustained progress" (143). He was among the century's greatest defenders of liberty, and a tireless advocate of political rights grounded in concrete institutions, tempered by experience, and sustained by the rule of law. Prior to the French Revolution, Burke adopted a progressive stance towards many of the most pressing issues of his day, backing the American colonists in their revolutionary struggle against the British crown and siding with the indigenous peoples of Ireland and India in their futile attempts to resist British colonial oppression. As another contributor to this volume has rightly pointed out, had Burke died in 1789, "nobody could conceivably have labeled him as a reactionary thinker."[1]

Yet this same enlightened man has long been labeled precisely that. And nowhere does the charge carry more apparent force than in the stance Burke took toward the great modernizing movement of the century, what we have come to call "the Enlightenment." Burke himself did not use the term, speaking instead, with irony, of "this enlightened age" (74). But in the work for which he is best known, the *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* he left little doubt as to whom, and what, he meant. Contrasting the simple virtues of his un-inquiring countrymen with the more sophisticated "pedantry and infidelity" of recent French philosophers, Burke took pains to emphasize the gulf between the two: "We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvétius has made no progress among us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that *we* have made no discoveries" (74, 73). As "men of untaught feelings," who clung to prejudice and feared God and king because it was *natural* to do so, the English, it seems, were blind to Enlightenment.

Such stark contrasts were reassuring to John Bull. And there can be little doubt that they helped sustain, until well into the twentieth century, a peculiarly English prejudice: that there was no Enlightenment in England. As recently as 1973, the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* was still toeing this line, defining the movement as "shallow and pretentious intellectualism, unreasonable contempt for authority and tradition, etc. applied *esp.* to the spirit and aims of the French philosophers of the 18th c."[2]

Yet for all his rhetoric to the contrary, Burke knew full well that this prejudice represented, at best, only a half-truth. Most likely he would have agreed with more recent historians who have pointed out that England, too, did a fair deal of discovering in the eighteenth century, and that this "British Enlightenment" was on the whole a very good thing. Serving to protect the gains of the 1688 settlement, the *British* movement of Enlightenment fostered religious tolerance, political liberty, commercial progress, and the rule of law. At the same time, it maintained a healthy respect for religion shorn of "fanaticism" and "superstition." Many of the British Enlightenment's leading advocates, in fact, were themselves clerics, who did much to promote the new climate of rational reform and nondogmatic debate. It was in such an environment that science, trade, and free inquiry flourished. And it was in such an environment that Burke himself undoubtedly felt most at home.

But Burke also believed strongly that these same virtues were under attack by the newfangled philosophers of France and their servile imitators in England—those he dubbed, dismissively, the "clan of the enlightened among us" (75). By training his engines on the one, he hoped to snuff out the other, for he feared the conflagration would spread. The radical French Enlightenment, in Burke's view, threatened to set ablaze the more moderate intellectual culture of Britain, reducing to ashes the well-sustained progress of the century.

Burke's powerfully hostile characterization of the French Enlightenment constitutes one of the chief polemical foundations of the *Reflections* and produced what is perhaps its most lasting impression. Indeed, the French Enlightenment has never quite been able to escape the dark suspicions with which Burke surrounded it. It is worth asking, then, on what evidence Burke based his convictions, and whether there was any justice to them. Might there have been a glimmer of enlightenment in his opposition to the (French) Enlightenment, a ray of unexpected historical insight? Or did

Burke's views simply represent, as his critics have long charged, the willful myopia of a reactionary who preferred, late in life, to lock himself in the dark?

From his earliest forays into print during the 1750s, Burke had defended the view that religion was the ultimate foundation of good government, and the bedrock of civil society. It followed directly from this view that those who undermined faith in the living Christian God also undermined faith in the natural social order. In his first book, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), Burke had set out to demonstrate this connection, taking to task a number of English writers charged with promoting deist, or even atheistic, views. But by the time he came to write the *Reflections,* Burke maintained that such men no longer enjoyed favor in the land of untaught feelings. "Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal . . . and that whole race who called themselves Free-thinkers?" Burke then asked, responding that the booksellers of London would confirm that such "lights of the world" were no longer read and were now long forgotten (76). By the latter part of the eighteenth century, in other words, the English reading public had allegedly repudiated the home-grown writers who had ventured into religious heterodoxy earlier in the century.

Whether Burke himself actually believed this dubious claim that the English had spurned religious freethinking, or whether he was indulging in another bit of preventative flattery of John Bull, is unclear. What is certain is that Burke believed philosophers of this freethinking variety to be very much at home in France, and their native influence to be extensive. There are strong indications, moreover, that Burke developed his own particular views on this subject with the help of a group of writers who were inclined to shape them very sharply indeed: *French* opponents of the century of lights. Ironically, the most famous English critique of the French Enlightenment was in part an imported product.

We know with certainty that Burke was in extremely close touch with a good number of the émigrés who trickled out of France from as early as July 1789.[3] It is also certain that he had long maintained both directly and through his son intimate relations with important segments of the French clergy following his own visit to France in 1773. And it is even more certain that many of these same clergy had long been convinced that the French Enlightenment constituted an apocalyptic threat to France, and even

to the world. In the writings of leading French philosophers—*philosophes* such as Voltaire, Diderot, Helvétius, and Raynal—and in the pages of the great philosophic weapon of war, the French *Encyclopedia,* defenders of the Catholic faith found evidence of what they believed was a formal effort to annihilate religion and overturn thrones. In this respect, their own articulation of the dangers posed by the writers of the French Enlightenment preceded by decades the upheavals of the revolutionary era. They would come to see the revolution itself as confirmation of what they had long predicted and feared.

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, in fact, with the publication of the *Encyclopedia,* French enemies of the Enlightenment had voiced their apprehensions with escalating alarm. In what may be called a Counter-Enlightenment they generated thousands of sermons, books, newspaper articles, and pamphlets that spread well beyond the borders of France.[4] To their mind, the "false philosophy" of the French Enlightenment, what they termed, simply, "*philosophie,*" was a collective force eating away at the "two great trees" of society—religion and monarchy—whose intertwined branches offered to all kingdoms "delicious shade and sure asylum." They had little doubt that the philosophes were engaged in a conscious effort to "hack down" both these trees "at the root."[5] Preaching the hatred of religion with a "fanaticism" that the world had not seen since the Religious Wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the philosophes had nevertheless managed to hide their lust for power behind the specious battle-cries of "tolerance," "humanity," and "freedom." First extending their dominion over the republic of letters, they had slowly insinuated their corrupting doctrines into the heart of mainstream society. The evidence of their success was everywhere apparent: weakened families, selfishness and individualism, a disdain for the past and a dissatisfaction with the present that translated directly into political license and revolt. As the journalist and clergyman Abbé Barruel declared typically in his widely selling anti-philosophe novel of the 1780s, *Les Helviennes,* "The School of Raynal, of Voltaire, of Jean-Jacques, of Helvétius, of Diderot . . . is one of rebellion, of insubordination, of anarchy. Kings have never had more decided enemies than our philosophes of the day."[6]

Given these well-established convictions, it is little wonder that Barruel and many others in his camp concluded well before the first delegates to the Estates General arrived in Versailles in May 1789 that the country's

political effervescence was bubbling up from a philosophic source. In the first year of the revolutionary upheaval they spread this view widely, charging that the revolution's radicals were fulfilling the designs of a formal philosophic conspiracy, a plot hatched long ago by the philosophic cabal.[7] Unless this conspiracy was unveiled, they warned, made known and then crushed, the revolution would continue until it had carried out the nefarious goals of its plotting masterminds: the annihilation of the French church, the destruction of its monarchy, and the total dissolution of France. From there it would push outward to engulf all of Europe in a torrent of blood.

The positions of the men and women who formulated these views varied, but by and large their politics were of a far sterner sort than anything Edmund Burke would have been willing to condone in 1789. For the most part proponents of absolute monarchy and deeply committed Catholics, these early ideologues of the French Right tended to look upon Protestants and Parliaments alike with great unease, bristling at the mere mention of liberty and tolerance, freedom and rights. They saw the French Enlightenment as the secular offspring of French Protestantism because many of the philosophes' demands, such as the call for religious toleration and the appeal to the individual use of reason, echoed in their minds Protestant politics and doctrine. Undoubtedly they would have viewed Burke's more enlightened tendencies in this regard—particularly his support for religious toleration—with distrust. Similarly, Burke would have taken umbrage at many of the French Counter-Enlightenment's darker propositions. If he could agree generally with the parallel they drew between the dangers unleashed by the radical Reformation and the dangers unleashed by the radical Enlightenment, he would have rejected categorical French anti-Protestantism as strongly as he rejected English anti-popery. And of the virtues of absolute monarchy Burke was never a friend.

Yet despite these and other differences, the rapid pace of the revolution forged strange alliances. Already by November 1789 the revolutionaries had nationalized the property of the French Catholic Church, preparing the way for its total transformation in the months to come. Such precipitate action gave genuine credence to the militant Counter-Enlightenment position. For did not the deeply anticlerical revolutionaries openly acknowledge the philosophes as their spiritual forefathers? And were they not moving with alarming speed to destroy the same institution that had always drawn philosophic wrath? In the face of bewildering events, the French Counter-

Enlightenment narrative of a philosophe conspiracy offered a straightforward means to comprehend the incomprehensible. Burke, among many others, was convinced, and in the *Reflections,* he repeated this narrative virtually in full.

"I hear on all hands," Burke declared in the crucial point of departure in the *Reflections,* "that a cabal, calling itself philosophic, receives the glory of many of the late proceedings [of the revolution]; and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them" (76). The opening clause of this sentence, "I hear on all hands," is likely an indication that Burke was receiving this information from the French émigrés in London and his contacts in France, among whom the theory of the philosophe conspiracy was already widespread.[8] But regardless of his ultimate source, Burke's account of the matter is revealingly similar to well-established French versions of the plot.

As Burke presented his rendition of the Counter-Enlightenment narrative in the *Reflections,* what distinguished French literary and intellectual life from that of England in the eighteenth century was less content than form. For though England, in the early part of the century, had admittedly given rise to the odd freethinking philosopher, such figures had never organized themselves into a formal "corps" or "faction in the state" as they allegedly had in France.[9] There, a cabal of "political Men of Letters" had taken shape, and their genesis could be traced to the early decades of the century:

> Since the decline of the life and greatness of Louis the Fourteenth, [men of letters] were not so much cultivated either by him, or by the regent, or the successors to the crown; nor were they engaged to the court by favors and emoluments so systematically as during the splendid period of that ostentatious and not impolitic reign. What they lost in the old court protection, they endeavored to make up by joining in a sort of incorporation of their own; to which the two academies of France, and afterwards the vast undertaking of the Encyclopaedia, carried on by a society of these gentlemen, did not a little contribute. (93)

Turned loose from their moorings at court, these political men of letters now drifted into dangerous waters. Anchored by neither the real responsibilities of government nor the concrete experience of power, they embarked on what Tocqueville, echoing Burke and others, would later term an "abstract literary politics" outside the normal channels of state.[10] Their first goal was to remove the greatest obstacle to their ascendance—the influence of the Catholic Church. As Burke continued directly:

> The literary cabal had some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion. This object they pursued with a degree of zeal which hitherto had been discovered only in the propagators of some system of piety. They were possessed with a spirit of proselytism in the most fanatical degree; and from thence, by an easy progress, with the spirit of persecution according to their means. (94)

Having established this terrible goal, the philosophes set out to achieve "dominion" over public opinion. This was nothing less than a moral crusade, waged in the drawing rooms of salons and literary societies, and on the pages of monthly journals and philosophic treatises. Contriving "to possess themselves, with great method and perseverance, of all the avenues to literary fame," they steadily mounted "the ranks of literature and science" (94).

Lauded by a public that was happy to acknowledge their undeniable talents but failed to appreciate the ultimate consequences of their systems, the philosophes further consolidated their "literary monopoly" through "intrigue." When wit and strength of argument failed them, they set in motion "an unremitting industry to blacken and discredit in every way, and by every means, all those who did not hold to their faction." By this route, and through this "exclusive spirit," were they able to corner the market on cultivated principle and taste (94).

In Burke's view, it had "long been clear" to those who had observed the spirit of the literary cabal "that nothing was wanted but the power of carrying the intolerance of the tongue and of the pen into a persecution which would strike at property, liberty, and life" (94). Only more recently, however, had these same observers been afforded a direct look at the resources marshaled by the philosophes to bring their revolutionary dress rehearsal to the stage. In the mid-1780s, the publication of Voltaire's correspondence with his erstwhile protector, Frederick the Great of Prussia, had shocked European Christian opinion with the frankness of its discussion of the need to radically reform kingdoms and to "crush the infamous thing" (the church).[11] The correspondence of other philosophes, such as Diderot and d'Alembert, with Frederick and Russia's Catherine II did little to mitigate this revulsion. As Burke himself added in a footnote, "I do not chuse to shock the feeling of the moral reader with any quotation of their vulgar, base, and profane language" (95n). It was overwhelmingly clear to him, nonetheless, that the literary cabal had sought the influence and protection of heads of state as part of their effort "to bring about the

changes they had in view." To these masters of intrigue, it made no difference whether such changes were "to be accomplished by the thunderbolt of despotism, or by the earthquake of popular commotion" (95).

Toward the same end did the philosophes cultivate those whom Burke termed the "monied interest," rich and influential creditors and financiers who speculated in public debt. In Burke's mind this interest represented an important revolutionary force in its own right. But to the philosophes it provided another inroad into the great "avenues to opinion." Well placed and influential (Burke singled out Louis XVI's short-lived chief minister, Turgot, a physiocratic economist, and indeed an ally of the philosophes), these men offered wealth, patronage, and the privileges of office to supplement the literary cabal's other significant resources. It was left, now, only to enlist the might of the people to bring the conspiracy to a close. Joining "obnoxious wealth to restless and desperate poverty," the philosophes, "like the propagators of all novelties, pretended to a great zeal for the poor, and the lower orders." Simultaneously, they "rendered hateful, by every exaggeration, the faults of courts, of nobility, and of priesthood." In this way did France's political men of letters become politicians —"demagogues"—who directly fanned the flames of revolt that were now burning for the world to see (95).

Viewed strictly, and narrowly, as a causal account of revolutionary origins, Burke's conspiracy theory, like virtually all conspiracy theories, can not bear sustained analysis. Similar to the plots chronicled by Counter-Enlightenment polemicists in France, which Burke's own so closely resembles, the *Reflections* attributes uniformity and intent to men who were often deeply divided among themselves, and who in any case never pursued, with foresight and conscious agency, the overthrow of the Old Regime. The leading philosophes of France sought reformation, to be sure, but despite language that was often incendiary, they never preached revolt. Quite the contrary, the majority would certainly have been revolted by this very prospect.[12]

Nor is it true, as Burke and his French allies affirmed, that men of letters became, in tandem with the monied interest, the "principal leaders of the Revolution." Careful studies of the composition of the National Assembly in its first year show that professional *hommes de lettres* constituted only a tiny fraction of the total number of deputies, a significant percentage of whom had practical training in local administration, law, and public

affairs.[13] These early lawmakers were not the abstract metaphysicians of subsequent myth any more than they were the minions and stooges of a directing philosophic cabal.

Qualifications of this kind are essential and beyond any reasonable doubt. Yet it would be a great mistake to simply abandon the inquiry there, dismissing Burke's musings on the French Enlightenment as so much reactionary paranoia. For to do so would be to fail to understand a central context in which Burke's attitudes were presented and formed, as well as to miss much of insight and lasting value in the *Reflections* themselves.

In the first place, Burke's invocation of conspiracy was less irrational when understood in eighteenth-century terms than it may seem today. As a means to comprehend contemporary political phenomena and a conceptual tool to explain political change, conspiracy was in fact a widespread eighteenth-century trope, employed frequently by Anglo-American colonists to unveil the machinations of corrupt English ministers, and by observers in Britain to explain the revolutionary stirrings in the New World or the intrigues and alliances that formed in their own House of Commons.[14] In France, as has been pointed out, enemies of the Enlightenment extensively invoked conspiracy rhetoric. But they were not alone. The philosophes themselves often spoke of the age-old conspiracy of priests to keep humanity in darkness, singling out the Jesuits for particular attack as a dark cabal that plotted the manipulation of monarchs and the manipulation of kingdoms in the silence of its cells. And during the revolution, conspiracy emerged as what the eminent historian, the late François Furet, has described as the central organizing principle of radical revolutionary rhetoric, marshaled above all by the Jacobins to condemn their clerical and aristocratic foes.[15]

Burke, then, was by no means alone with the Counter-Enlightenment in turning to conspiracy to help understand the events of his time. But it was more than simply strength of numbers that gave his analysis resonance and appeal. Equally important is the fact that Europe in the 1780s had already witnessed a conspiracy—an *actual* conspiracy—whose detection had unleashed a continent-wide panic in the years preceding the revolution. Led by a young German professor at the University of Ingolstadt, the so-called Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy took its name from its place of origin and the society of its founder, Adam Weishaupt. Plotting to infiltrate established Masonic lodges throughout Europe, the Illuminati, or "enlightened ones,"

hoped to use these organizations as fronts to spread their own republican, egalitarian, and anticlerical beliefs.[16] Foiled before it could have any real impact, and never, in the first place, a serious threat to European order, the conspiracy nonetheless appeared to confirm the worst suspicions of church officials and Counter-Enlightenment polemicists, provoking a heated denunciatory literature on the continent. In the *Reflections,* Burke cites two examples of this literature, written in German and published in Munich in 1787, pointing out that France was not the only country susceptible to the present revolutionary upheavals: "Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow murmuring under ground; a confused movement is felt, that threatens a general earthquake in the political world. Already confederacies and correspondences of the most extraordinary nature are forming, in several countries. In such a state of things we ought to hold ourselves upon our guard" (132).

Here one finds what is, perhaps, the most convincing "justification" of Burke's use of the language of conspiracy—its contemporary *rhetorical* power. In a Europe primed to fear the machinations of insidious plotters, in a Europe looking with unease at the pace of French revolutionary events, the rhetoric of conspiracy dramatized the need to put an end to this hideous deceit before it carried out its final aims. Seen through this lens, the revolution was always more dangerous than it otherwise appeared, for left to run its course, the power of philosophy would "crush the infamous thing"—and much else—in ways that were anything but figurative. To men and women who had watched since mid-century as the philosophes *did* catapult themselves to international stardom and acclaim; *did* place themselves and their supporters in positions of cultural authority; and *did* help to carry out a sea change in European public opinion—these theories of conspiracy seemed far more reasonable than they do to us today. And the revolutionaries themselves appeared only too ready to confirm them, through their actions and through their words. In July 1791—a mere eight months after the publication of Burke's *Reflections*—their oft-repeated praise for the philosophes culminated in the extraordinary transfer of Voltaire's remains to the former Parisian church of St. Geneviève, now the Pantheon, the resting place of great men. In this modern shrine, Voltaire was to be worshipped as a philosophic saint. Were not the revolutionaries openly admitting what their enemies alleged? When Burke used the

language of conspiracy, he did so with the knowledge that his charges would stick.

Simply to write off Burke's invocation of the philosophe plot, then, without further consideration of context is to miss the way in which this master rhetorician was drawing on a well-established narrative to direct fear toward his ultimate end: the consolidation of counterrevolutionary opposition. His use of that familiar narrative explains in part the widespread favorable reception of the *Reflections* on the continent, especially in Germany and France. But let there be no mistake. Burke also fully *believed* what he said, and that fact, too, should give us pause. His undeniable exaggeration and overstatement notwithstanding, was there a shaft of insight shining through his dark critique?

Ironically, one of Burke's stated adversaries in the *Reflections,* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, most likely would have conceded that there was. For Rousseau himself had written late in life a philosophe conspiracy theory that read very much like Burke's. A former friend and associate of Voltaire, Diderot, and other of the century's leading lights, Rousseau had since fallen out with these men, coming to see much of their speculation as dangerously misguided. In his book, published posthumously as the *Dialogues* or *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques,* he vented this long-standing resentment against the philosophes in no uncertain terms. Substituting "philosophic intolerance" for religious fanaticism, these "great imitators" of the recently deposed Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) now governed minds with monkish inflexibility, persecuting their opponents with an all-powerful "philosophic inquisition" and "burning without shame all who believed in God."[17] They had united themselves into a "sect," a "corps grouped under chiefs," plotting to become the "arbiters of public opinion." Cultivating the rich and powerful, they reached out to all those who, like themselves, were "disposed to secret intrigues and subterranean machination." Spreading their ideas through young students—"emissaries" and "operatives"—whom they "initiated into the secrets of the sect," they arranged for those in league to keep watch over one another so that all would "remain faithful to the plot." In this way had the century become one of "hatred and secret conspiracies."[18]

Acrid and infirm, Rousseau in the years prior to his death in 1778 was hardly a model of unbiased judgment. But his bitterness here, like Burke's, is worth taking seriously, if for no other reason than it was well received. As

Robert Darnton, America's foremost historian of eighteenth-century France, has shown in a now classic argument, many aspiring philosophes who came to Paris in the years prior to the revolution in the hopes of becoming Voltaires came away with similar impressions.[19] These Grub Street hacks of what Darnton has called the Low-Enlightenment did not, it is true, generally speak this same language of conspiracy. But they entirely shared Rousseau's sense that the great philosophes of literary France operated a closed, and intolerant, shop. Siding with the divine Jean-Jacques, whom they idolized as a fellow outcast, these *rousseaux de ruisseaux,* these "gutter Rousseaus," seethed with bitterness outside the locked doors of the literary cabal. Chewing on their anger, they came to see the privileged world of the philosophes as a metonym for the privileged world of the Old Regime. Venting their rage at both, they pushed Enlightenment discourse far beyond anything the philosophes would have comfortably condoned, lashing out at the despotism and injustice, the intolerance and fanaticism, the hierarchy and wealth of the political, as well as the philosophic, *monde*.

Now Burke in the *Reflections* was little inclined to draw distinctions between High and Low Enlightenments, between a Rousseau who thought in the gutter and gutter Rousseaus. Yet he clearly appreciated that something like what Darnton describes had taken place in eighteenth-century France. The monopoly of the literary cabal may not, in his view, have set off an internal conflict between its higher and lower parts. But the philosophes had surely summoned into being a group of angry young men who were prepared to outdo their childhood idols in radical word and deed. "I believe," Burke observed, "that were Rousseau alive, and in one of his lucid intervals, he would be shocked at the practical phrenzy of his scholars, who in their paradoxes are servile imitators, and even in their incredulity discover an implicit faith" (145). Burke also recognized that these children would end by overturning their parents and grinding their former idols under foot: "Along with its natural protectors, and guardians [nobility and the clergy], learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" (68).

In certain respects this is Burke at his least savory, leading one to appreciate why some observers have found it difficult to move beyond such regrettable characterizations of ordinary people. But despite the unpleasant choice of words, this is also Burke at his most insightful. For like Rousseau in the extract cited above, and like certain members of the French Counter-

Enlightenment, Burke understood that there was a potentially "religious-like" fanaticism lurking in the secular philosophy of the French Enlightenment. "These Atheistical fathers have a bigotry of their own," he commented with reference to the literary cabal, "and they have learnt to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk" (94). Burke no doubt exaggerated when he added that "a violent and malignant zeal, of a kind hitherto unknown in the world, had taken entire possession of their minds, and rendered their whole conversation, *which otherwise would have been pleasing and instructive,* perfectly disgusting" (94; emphasis added). But his revealing qualification "otherwise" highlights the fact that Burke's quarrel was less with the Enlightenment and more with the manner in which it was carried out. The "intolerance of the tongue" had created a climate ill conducive to reasoned dissent, and particularly the reasoned dissent of religion. When the philosophes and their Low Enlightenment successors flirted with demagoguery and political power, they released this "wild gas" into the surrounding air with explosive results.

Burke's models for thinking about this new type of fanaticism were the religious conflicts that had swept Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the "pulpit style" of religious politics that had raged throughout his own country during the English Civil War (11). But he also understood that both the home-grown and French varieties of this modern enthusiasm were something new, and that they threatened to obliterate the very values that had made the eighteenth century one of relative progress, peace, and enlightenment. What Burke was condemning in its earliest form is what we now recognize as ideology. And what he understood with great foresight is the power of modern intellectuals, acting as a literary clerisy, to produce it. Burke's *Reflections* is an early, and trenchant, attack on the treason of the clerks.

There is thus a good deal of light in Burke's critique of the Enlightenment, even in its seemingly darkest places. But if Burke was able to penetrate with his characteristically piercing vision into realms where others saw only black, we should not let this blind us, in turn, from what Burke himself may not have seen in the final years of his life. Those same French enemies of the Enlightenment on which he drew in shaping his view of the literary cabal were emerging as an ideological force of their own. Their hatred of enlightened values—tolerance, progress, liberty, and individual rights—was as fanatical as it was new. Their modern politics of

the Right was not conservative but revolutionary in its desire to remake the world in the image of a rigorous ideal.

For most of his life Burke had fought hard to defend these enlightened values, and to oppose anyone—Enlightened or not—who assailed them. But as the French Revolution degenerated into open terror and international conflagration, he, like many others, grew less discerning. In the year of his death (1797), Burke wrote to the Abbé Barruel to thank him for sending a copy of the first volume of his conspiracy-theory magnum opus, the just published *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme*. Though destined to become one of the most widely read works of the 1790s, the book is a sinister and unquestionably dark treatment of the philosophe, Mason, and Jacobin plot to destroy the Old Regime. Even allowing for the conventional niceties of polite exaggeration, Burke's reaction to the work is clear. "I cannot easily express to you," he wrote to the exiled French clergyman in May 1797, "how much I am instructed and delighted by the first Volume of your History of Jacobinism. The whole of the wonderful narrative is supported by documents and proofs with the most juridical regularity and exactness. Your reflexions and reasonings are interspersed with infinite judgment, and in their most proper places, for leading the sentiments of the reader, and preventing the force of plausible objections. The tendency of the whole is admirable in every point of view, political, religious, and, let me make use of the abused word, philosophical."[20]

At an earlier point in his life, Burke would not have found this hate-filled book by a fanatical Jesuit—one who spoke in the most intolerant "spirit of a monk"—either admirable or philosophical. That he could do so at this stage is an eloquent commentary on the polarizing effects of the revolution. It also suggests that in removing the log from the Enlightened eye, Burke may have left a speck in his own—a speck that prevented him from seeing at the time of his death what has subsequently become more clear. Clerks to the right of this enlightened conservative would commit treason, too, and some, regrettably, in Burke's own name.

Notes

1. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 595.

2. Cited in Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2001), 5.

3. See Colin Lucas, "Edmund Burke and the Émigrés," in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *The Transformation of Political Culture,* vol. 3 of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture,* 4 vols. (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987–94), 3: 101–31.

4. On this subject, see my *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. chapter 1.

5. This is the characteristic formulation of the anti-philosophe journalist and man of letters Jean Soret in his *Essai sur les moeurs, nouvelle édition considérablement augmentée,* 2 vols. (Paris: Chez la veuve Duchesne, 1784), 2: 120–21.

6. Augustin Barruel, *Les Helviennes, ou Lettres provinciales philosophiques,* 5 vols. (Paris, 1781–89), 5: 367–68. The widely reviewed work, which went through at least five editions before 1789, was also translated into Spanish, German, Italian, and Polish.

7. On the importance of conspiracy theories in the early revolution, see McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment,* esp. chapter 2.

8. See Lucas, "Edmund Burke and the Émigrés," 102, 105.

9. See the comparison in Burke, *Reflections* (76).

10. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution,* Stuart Gilbert, trans. (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1955), 139. See, in general, the famous Chapter 1, Part 3, "How towards the middle of the eighteenth century men of letters took the lead in politics and the consequences of this new development."

11. *Recueil des lettres de M. de Voltaire et du roi de Prusse* (N.p.: Imprimerie de la Société littéraire-typographique, 1785).

12. On this theme, see the judicious account of John Lough, *The Philosophes and Post-Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

13. Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 50–53.

14. See esp. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 86–90, 105–10, 119ff, and 145–49, and Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd series, 39 (1982): 401–41.

15. See François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution,* Elborg Forster, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16. See the account of the conspiracy and the European reaction in J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 129ff.

17. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques,* in *Oeuvres complètes,* Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, eds., 5 vols. (Paris: Pléiade, 1959–95), 1: 890–91, 967–68. Rousseau discusses the plot in detail in both the second dialogue (principally 888–92) and the third (964–74).

18. All citations are taken from ibid., 1: 965–69.

19. Robert Darnton, "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature," in Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1–40.

20. Edmund Burke to the Abbé Barruel, 1 May 1797, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke,* R. B. McDowell, ed., 10 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958–78), 9: 319–320.

Why American Constitutionalism Worked

JACK N. RAKOVE

In August 1999, in Portobello Road in London, I found a hand-colored copy of the late eighteenth-century English cartoonist James Gillray's vicious commentary on constitution-making, French style, which I later happily purchased. Gillray portrays the French Directory, circa 1798, busily drafting, tossing away, and filing all sorts of constitutions. Napoleon sits at the table, quill in hand, while the Abbé Sieyes, perhaps the leading late eighteenth-century theorist of French constitutionalism,[1] mans the pigeonholes in which constitutions are stored to be forgotten (or perhaps retrieved, as occasion demands). Edmund Burke would have appreciated the thought underlying this sketch, even if the execution falls far short of Burke's own aesthetic standards, and even though Burke himself had once been the object of Gillray's satire. Burke, who died in 1797, would have drawn considerable satisfaction from the fulfillment of his predictions that the French revolutionary constitution of 1790 would not end constitution-making in France and that the original projectors of a French constitution, such as Sieyes, would eventually find themselves subject to the intervention of the army.

Gillray's "Vive le [*sic*] Constitution" is an eighteenth-century version of what now passes for a joke in political science: an earnest tourist walks into a bookstore and asks to purchase a copy of the French constitution, only to have the offended proprietor retort that his store does not stock periodical literature. Indeed, since 1790 the structure of French constitutions and government has undergone one major transformation after another. That notion of a constitution and the experience of government in flux are, of course, the opposite of the working American definition, which treats a constitution as an expression of fundamental law adopted and exalted at one moment of historical time. Such a constitution is subject to occasional, relatively difficult amendment and an ongoing process of judicial

interpretation, but the original document retains its primary authority. Burke would still have preferred the general model of the British constitution settled on the "revolution principles" of 1688–89 to the newfangled American notion of a written constitution, but how would he have assessed the claims for progress in political thinking and constitutional formation that the Americans believed and boasted they had made?

Regrettably, that question is not easily answered, because Burke's once extensive and passionate interest in American affairs declined markedly after the former colonies were irretrievably lost to British rule in 1783. Of course, Burke had good reason to move on to other concerns. One was the impeachment of Warren Hastings, serendipitously getting under way just as the framers of the American Constitution were preserving this largely discredited medieval remedy for public corruption. The other, far more important concern was Burke's early and deep alarm over the tenor and course of the revolution in France, which led him to write the single work for which he is now best remembered. Burke's dark and prophetic obsession with France was indeed the dominant political passion of his final years. It gave him ample reason to neglect the intriguing if less turbulent events unfolding across the Atlantic during the same years. The American constitutional experiment no longer posed a major threat to British interests at home or abroad; the French revolutionary challenge did.

Still, our regret over Burke's later indifference to America remains genuine, for several reasons. As early as his association with the Rockingham Whigs, whose brief stay in power in 1766 covered the repeal of the Stamp Act, Burke had thought carefully about the dilemmas Britain faced in preserving its authority over America. He had been extremely knowledgeable about American affairs, in large part due to his long service as agent for the colonial assembly of New York. He was still skillfully representing the colony's interests even as the revolutionary crisis broke in the winter of 1774, when the ministry of Lord North, reacting to a protest that truly was a tea party next to the revolutionary violence across the Channel in 1789, unwisely decided to punish Massachusetts *pour décourager les autres* American colonies from resisting claims of parliamentary sovereignty. His contemporary analysis of the errors and fallacies of the ministry's policy in 1775 was exceptionally, even uniquely, thoughtful. It is difficult to think of any work of political analysis written in any country, at any time, by any author, on any issue, as profound as

Burke's famous speech on conciliation of March 23, 1775, delivered only four weeks before civil war erupted in Massachusetts.[2]

That speech goes well beyond enumerating the obvious challenges Britain would have to overcome to suppress armed resistance in distant colonies. Its critical passage instead offers a highly nuanced explanation of the deeper sources and characteristics of American political culture. Burke neatly distinguishes, for example, the religious roots of opposition in the northern colonies from the fierce (if seemingly perverse) attachment to liberty manifested by the slaveholders of the South. He reflects on the deep rights-consciousness that permeates American society. And perhaps most intriguingly, he concludes the mini-essay on political culture embedded in the larger speech with a prescient warning about the knowledge that Americans might imminently acquire of their own capacity for independence and self-government, by virtue of living through a crisis in which the normal operations of legal government have already been suspended. Burke astutely notes that the Americans are learning that, instead of the anarchy predicted and dreaded by conventional theory, they can maintain good order even without legal government. Why, then, should they be content to go back to something they have managed to do without? Here Burke displays an almost sympathetic appreciation of the possibilities of revolution, an appreciation that contrasts sharply with his abhorrence of the events in France of 1789.

Historians today generally regard the American Constitution that went into effect during the spring and summer of 1789 as the fulfillment of the process of revolutionary self-government that began with the interregnum of 1774–75. It would certainly be interesting to know how Burke would have understood and explained the process that unfolded in America during the intervening years, especially if we join recent historians in emphasizing the innovative and experimental quality of the American exercise in republican constitutionalism. Those historians recognize that what the Americans were doing during the 1770s and 1780s marked a new and genuinely revolutionary departure in politics and government. As Alexander Hamilton, writing as "Publius," wrote in the opening paragraph of the first *Federalist* essay: "It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice,

or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force."[3] Hamilton's reference to what has been "frequently remarked" is revealing.

Earlier generations of American historians took, in fact, a different view. They considered the formative period of American constitutionalism less as an exercise in invention than as a maturation of institutions and traditions with deeply English roots. They wrote in terms Burke might have appreciated, wistfully emphasizing the organic ties connecting these two diverging yet related branches of Anglo-American constitutionalism. Indeed, they may perhaps have appealed to these Burkean values in order to distinguish the orderly development of the American revolutionary constitutional experience from the violence and instability of France. Since the 1960s, however, American constitutional history has been written in a different key, one that better captures the pride the revolutionaries of 1776 and 1787 took in rejecting conventional wisdom and that also therefore explains why so many Americans initially greeted the news from France as confirmation that their wartime ally had been inspired by their own example.

After the British defeat at Yorktown in 1781, Burke had played an important role in dissuading George III from pursuing the military conflict with America. Thereafter Burke certainly remained aware of what had happened in the United States in the late 1780s. He directly referred to the American Constitution during the famous debate of May 1791 that witnessed his dramatic break with Charles James Fox, his longtime Whig friend and political ally. The ostensible subject of debate was the Quebec Government Bill, but for Burke this exchange provided an occasion to contrast the merits of British constitutionalism with the vices he attributed to the revolutionary regime in France. Amid repeated calls for order on the grounds that his disparaging comments on France were irrelevant to the subject at hand, Burke insisted that the question of what kind of constitution the inhabitants of Quebec were to receive justified the comparisons he wanted to make. There were in fact three constitutional models to consider, Burke told the Commons on May 6: the British, the French, and the American, the last of which he discussed first to get it out of the way.

Burke's brief discussion of the American Constitution is intriguing but disappointing; he had more urgent matters to move on to. He began by noting that the Canadians "should have nothing to envy in the constitution

of a country so near to their own"; that is, they should not feel they had been given a government of an inferior stamp. The newer elements of the Canadian populace, the loyalist refugees who had sided with their king in 1776, "had fled from the blessings of American government, and there was no danger of their going back."[4] They would be content with a government on the British model, not that of the United States. Burke then offered his only known comments on the merits of the American Constitution.

Burke's essential points on the subject were three: First, the Americans were already a people suited for republican government, not only because "they had a certain quantity of phlegm, of old English good nature, that fitted them better for it," but also because their prior education and government were already strongly republican. They did not have to be remade in a new image. Second, the war in which they had gained independence had also taught them "order, submission to command, and a regard for great men," which seems to be an allusion to George Washington. "They were trained," Burke further noted, "to government by war, not by plots, murders, and assassinations." Third, although the Americans lacked the "materials of monarchy or aristocracy among them," they did not run into the opposite extreme but instead "formed their government, as nearly as they could, according to the model of the British constitution." And if the American Constitution was only derivative from the British, Burke asked, why not give the Canadians a suitable version of the original, genuine article?[5] There Burke's discussion of the American constitution ended, unconcerned with all the innovations and improvements in political science the Americans rashly believed they had made, or with the process whereby they had reached agreement. Nothing in this discussion suggests that Burke associated the constitutional developments in America with the turmoil he so sternly condemned in France.

There are occasional passages in the *Reflections,* which had appeared about six months before the debate over the Quebec Government Bill, from which one might infer how Burke might have evaluated particular facets of the American Constitution, but again, these are too sketchy to provide anything more than material for speculation. (The most interesting would involve comparing Burke's criticisms of the French National Assembly's creation of the new *departments* with the ways in which the Federal Convention treated the preexisting American states.) It would be presumptuous to attempt to speak for Burke in this way. Instead, let us try

(in the spirit of his own analysis of 1775 of the futility of repressing American resistance) to identify some of the salient factors that enabled the American experiment in republican constitutionalism to succeed where the French trial of revolutionary constitutionalism failed. At first glance, such an analysis may seem to have little to do with Burke's concerns about France. But in fact, it is altogether fitting and proper to consider the relevance of the American experience in a volume dedicated to rethinking and reassessing Burke's *Reflections*. Furthermore, a comparison of that experience with Burke's condemnation of France will illustrate how much the American constitutional experiment differed from that occurring in Europe.

It is one of the nice ironies of history that the bicentennial of the French Revolution coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the symbolic (and arguably real) end of the revolutionary tradition that lasted exactly two centuries. But another bicentennial was also being observed at the same time: that of the American Constitution of 1787 and its celebrated amendments of 1789. Did the demise of one revolutionary tradition, symbolized by the respective pulling down of those two brooding piles of masonry, the Bastille and the Wall, mark the historical triumph of another, which requires no physical symbol other than a facsimile of the document of 1787?

Here, then, are seven aspects of the American constitutional deliberations of 1787 in Philadelphia that help to explain the success of the American constitutional experiment.

Conditions of deliberation. The Philadelphia Convention came to order (nearly a fortnight late) on May 28, 1787, and save for a ten-day adjournment, it sat continuously until September 17. Its deliberations were secret, and even the handful of delegates who were completely disgruntled with the proceedings did not seek to abort its privacy by violating their promise and leaking the deliberations to the public. When the New York delegates John Lansing and Robert Yates returned home for good in early July, they had it in their power to blow the whistle on what was transpiring at Philadelphia; and they could even have justified a decision to do so by claiming that the Convention had violated its mandate to revise the Articles of Confederation. But instead, they remained quiet until the Convention had adjourned.

The advantages of secrecy, and the sense of gentlemanly honor that maintained it, need little elaboration. The delegates were insulated from populist pressures, and while newspapers and individuals freely speculated about what the Convention was doing, these speculations were without political consequence. The framers had no gallery to play to, nor constituents to consult. They were free to deliberate as they wished, and they realized that whatever credit or blame they earned would depend on the merits of the constitution they finally proposed, not their fidelity to the original expectations of the public at large. So they sat behind closed doors, allegedly with the windows of the assembly room on the main floor of the Statehouse nailed shut; and when one delegate imprudently left a telling piece of paper behind (so the story goes), the stern warning delivered by the presiding officer, none other than George Washington, was sufficient to chastise the entire group. Contrast this dignified privacy with the horrified picture Burke has left of the National Assembly in Paris: "They act like the comedians of a fair before a riotous audience; they act amidst the tumultuous cries of a mixed mob of ferocious men, and of women lost to shame, who, according to their insolent fancies, direct, control, applaud, explode them; and sometimes mix and take their seats amongst them; domineering over them with a strange mixture of servile petulance and proud presumptuous authority" (58). Is this a deliberative convention or a depraved carnival?

More is at stake here, though, than the advantage the American framers gained by mere privacy. The nature of the Convention's deliberations is material for three further reasons, each of which would probably have received Burke's commendation.

First, unlike the deputies to the Estates General, who gathered in the spring of 1789, bearing their communities' *cahiers* of grievances, the framers arrived in Philadelphia more or less uninstructed as to the scope and objects of their deliberations. One has to say more or less, because some of the delegates' credentials seemingly restricted them to revising (as opposed to scrapping) the Articles of Confederation, while the Delaware delegates went to the trouble of securing legislative instructions prohibiting them from accepting any alteration in the rule giving each state an equal vote. But in practice, the framers easily swept both these formal restrictions aside. To be sure, Burke might have objected that the delegates to Philadelphia had independently changed the purpose of the gathering, much

as he later complained that the members of the National Assembly who had originally met as the Estates General had altered their own commission. But surely the behavior of the Philadelphia Convention would have quickly alleviated those concerns, as the framers displayed what he called the "principles of conservation and correction," eschewing abstract theory in favor of concrete reference to "the concerns, the actions, the passions, the interests of men" (19, 154).

Second, in choosing to ignore their original restrictions and to defy public expectations, the framers took advantage of one of the chief innovations of American constitutionalism: the idea of a constitutional convention as a body called for the sole purpose of proposing a framework of government, but lacking the authority to promulgate a constitution in its own right. In effect, the knowledge that they were only proposing, not disposing, liberated the framers to consider the best plan they felt they could obtain. Someone else—the people at large, acting through specially elected conventions—would have to bestow consent upon the finished project. In this respect the American framers self-consciously embraced the very kind of political self-restraint that Burke found so lacking in the French National Assembly. This endorsement of the principle of popular ratification also meant that the American Constitution, once approved, would enjoy a legitimacy never achieved in France.

But, in the third place, no one who has labored on a project of such complexity would want to have it submitted piecemeal to some other body, there to be picked over bit by bit, with some proposals being accepted, others rejected, and still others recommitted or sent back for further study. One cannot allow a constitution, to use the modern saying, to be nibbled to death by ducks. The framers accordingly insisted that the state ratification conventions deliver a straight up-or-down, yes-or-no decision on the constitution *in toto,* and that rule enabled the actions of the state conventions to be rendered in completely unambiguous terms, so that there could be no challenge to the legitimacy or legality of what had been done.

Leading voices. The American Constitution was thus the collective work of a small deliberative body, laboring closely together over a matter of months, in a process that encouraged all but a handful of dissenters to support the final result. This small size and cohesive composition of the Philadelphia Convention sharply contrasted with the large, polyglot membership of the National Assembly so deplored by Burke. In the months

that followed the publication of the constitution, the completed document was often portrayed as an act of collective wisdom, and its supporters urged wavering or doubting citizens to act in the same spirit. But not all delegates contributed equally to the result; many, indeed a majority, sat silently through nearly four months of debate, taking everything seriously, no doubt, but unable to screw up their courage to the point of speaking.

Of those who did participate actively—those who took upon themselves the vocation Burke described as the "physician of the state" (154)—scholars generally accord the greatest role to James Madison, though not because he gained all the key points he sought. In fact, Madison lost on all the issues that mattered most to him: proportional representation in both houses of Congress; a congressional veto on state laws; and an executive-judicial council of revision to improve the quality of lawmaking. Yet Madison's preparations for the Convention, and the influence he exercised over the proceedings, had a profound effect.

Before the Convention assembled, most Americans, and even most of the delegates, probably expected that its business would not extend beyond proposing some additional powers to be added to the Continental Congress, the unicameral assembly which was the nation's effective (or ineffective) national government. Madison, however, had reached other conclusions, through what might be considered a Burkean route, based upon experience that took into account concrete circumstances. Drawing upon both his extensive reading in the history of ancient and modern confederacies, and his experience as a member of Congress and the Virginia legislature, Madison had come to believe that the Union had to be allowed to act directly and legally upon the population, rather than rely on the states to carry out its recommendations. That in turn meant that the Union had to be reconstituted as a national government, composed of three distinct departments, including a bicameral legislature with at least one house directly elected by the people.

Even more radical was Madison's idea of the proper relation between national and state governments. By the spring of 1787, Madison believed that the individual state assemblies, often acting in response to pressures from their constituents, were enacting far too many laws for their own good, and that many of these laws were not only unwise and unnecessary but also unjust. This specter so alarmed Madison as to convince him that an unlimited national veto on all state laws was the "least possible

encroachment on the State jurisdictions" that the new constitution should make.[6]

The fact that this proposal and others proved too ambitious for his colleagues at Philadelphia may suggest that Madison's influence has been overrated. But such a judgment would overlook a more fundamental point. Madison's comprehensive criticism of what he called the "vices of the political system of the United States" became the effective starting point for the Convention's deliberations, enlarging its agenda well beyond what anyone might have expected.[7]

It is, again, regrettable that Burke knew nothing of Madison, for the ideals of lawmaking and representation that the American framer had hoped to see instituted at the national level of government resemble the parliamentarian's vision, as expressed most famously in his 1774 speech to the electors of Bristol. Like other Americans, Madison would have rejected Burke's defense of the inequities of representation in the eighteenth-century Parliament as a fundamental injustice. But when it came to defining the duties of the representative once elected, Madison was inclined to agree that his proper responsibility was to act not as an attorney for his constituents' immediate and parochial interests but rather as someone charged with deliberating broadly and disinterestedly on the true national good.

Lessons of experience. Madison and his colleagues, like Burke, were deeply versed in the eighteenth-century world of arts and letters, though, to be sure, some were better versed than others, and not all read the works of history, philosophy, and political science with equal insight. Americans were provincials, without access to the cultural riches that distinguished life in the courtly monarchies of the Old World from the hard-won but still modest gentility of the North American marchland. But by 1787, the framers of the American constitutions enjoyed one distinct and potent advantage that European political reformers, including the soon-to-be revolutionaries in France, conspicuously lacked. They had an experience of constitutional innovation that had begun with the drafting of the first state constitutions and the Articles of Confederation in the mid-1770s. True, the circumstances of deliberation back then were less than ideal. Not only was there a war on, which meant that more urgent concerns than constitutional forms pressed on the members of the provincial conventions and the Continental Congress; but in drafting these new constitutions, Americans naturally tended to look backward to the abuses they had suffered under the

ancien régime of colonial rule, rather than forward to the demands that war would place on their untested governments. Under these conditions they began to realize that eviscerating the executive in the name of securing legislative supremacy was not the wisest path to follow. Moreover, the very idea of a written constitution was a novelty, and some allowance must be made for the difficulty Americans faced in determining the authority such a document should command.

But the difficulties and constraints that surrounded the drafting of these first constitutions also created the problems and opportunities on which the framers of 1787 were acting. They acted as they did because they had a decade of hard-earned experience on which to draw. Without that experience, their knowledge of the classic works of history, political theory, and public law would have availed them little. To be sure, these great works provided them with a vocabulary of political ideas and a storehouse of examples and illustrations upon which they freely drew. But it was the experience of conducting public affairs, of trying to make the new constitutions work and having to ask why the high hopes of 1776 had gone awry, that led the reformers of 1787 to rethink basic premises and initial attitudes. Whereas Burke could complain of the French National Assembly that "the best were only men of theory" (35), the leading voices in the American Constitutional Convention were persons whom Burke himself could have recognized as men of experience. With voices such as Madison's in the lead they looked not only to the long wisdom of past experience to guide their thinking but also to lessons, good and bad, drawn from their own experience. Far more than their reading, this was what enabled their thinking to move in genuinely novel directions.

Madison again offers the best illustration. Scholars have made much of the inspiration he may have found in the political essays of David Hume, and it is noteworthy that Madison prepared for the convention by reading extensively in the history of ancient and modern confederacies (we still have his reading notes).[8] But Madison (to borrow his own image from *Federalist* 37) was not a speculative philosopher planning a constitution in the privacy of his study; he was a political activist with an uncommon bent for reflecting on the deeper implications for constitutional governance of the more immediate struggles in which he was engaged. His first comment on the famous problem of the factious majority, the majority which does not rule in pursuit of the general good, comes not as a note on Montesquieu but

rather as an almost casual remark inserted in a private letter discussing an urgent public issue of 1786: the willingness of the eight northernmost states to sacrifice southern interests in securing the free navigation of the Mississippi River.[9] Madison read widely, deeply, and critically, but he reasoned, as Burke thought the best statesmen should, about this reading on the basis of his political experience.

Not all the framers of the constitution were as reflective as Madison, but some were, and all had a common body of experience upon which to draw. Unlike the French revolutionaries after 1789, the American constitutionalists after 1776 had found their experiments overtaken by events, but not overwhelmed by them. The revolutionary conflict sorely tried the capacity of the governments the Americans created, and it exposed critical gaps in their assumptions about institutions and citizens alike. Yet it never led them to challenge or repudiate the original legacy of 1776. The creation of a self-governing republic remained the end of the revolution, not its means. In America, the lessons of experience were hard earned, but even at the bleakest moments of the War of the American Revolution, when many moderates must have wondered what strange enthusiasm had possessed them to go to war against Britain, the new constitutional forms remained intact.

The challenges the French revolutionaries faced were far more daunting. Long pent-up demands for reform were exacerbated by food shortages and the impoverishment of a hefty portion of the population; and these pressures were compounded by the onset of conflict with the counterrevolutionary monarchies. Moreover, neither Philadelphia nor any other community in America could exert the same volatile and dangerous pressure that the population of the city of Paris, as Burke never tired of reminding his readers, could release at any moment. Novel experiences the French Revolution generated aplenty, but they arrived so fast and furiously that the opportunity for deep reflection that the American framers enjoyed —the opportunity, that is, to ponder the experience of an entire decade— never became possible.

The puzzle of federalism. Most of the reflection and innovation that went into the drafting of the American Constitution was devoted to designing the institutions of the national government. Here was where the lessons learned from the experiences of the states proved most salient. In effect, the restoration of executive and judicial power conceived by the

Constitution was a reaction against the apparent consequences of legislative supremacy in the states. But in political terms, the most difficult questions the framers faced revolved around determining the boundaries between the new supremacy of the national government and the residual sovereignty (or perhaps autonomy would be a better word) of the states. In this respect, the destruction of older, historical political and administrative boundaries undertaken by the French National Assembly and so repeatedly decried in Burke's pages, could be nothing more than a passing speculative fancy at Philadelphia. The true problem was whether to give the existing states equal representation in at least one house of the new bicameral Congress. That question preoccupied the framers for the first seven weeks of debate, and it ended only with the misnamed Great Compromise of July 16, 1787, which gave each state two senators, regardless of their population or wealth.

But beyond this problem of representation lay a more complicated question. What degree of centralization (or consolidation, as contemporaries would have said) did the framers wish to propose? Should they seek a fundamental reconstitution of the Union that would relegate the states to some condition well below the rank of sovereignty (whatever that might mean)? Or should they be content with guaranteeing that the national government would no longer have to depend on the voluntary compliance of the states to execute its own powers and duties, while leaving the states in possession of virtually all of their original authority?

In the abstract, these questions could be answered in a number of ways. At one extreme, the New Jersey Plan amounted to a mere reinvigoration of the existing Confederation. At the other, Madison's desire to give the national government a veto over all state laws would have definitively stripped the states of any pretension of sovereignty. Neither of these extreme options seemed practicable. The New Jersey Plan clearly did not go far enough, while Madison's negative would have left the entire corpus of state legislation subject to congressional review. Even if one could imagine how Congress would find the time and resources to monitor the states, the very idea seemed likely to doom the constitution to rejection.

In the end, the framers solved the problem of federalism in more prosaic terms. When forced to ask whether the Union could be reconstituted without the states, the framers simply could not imagine how they could abandon the existing infrastructure of federalism and start, in effect, from scratch. Instead, they identified a specific set of legislative powers best

exercised by the national government, imposed a modest number of restrictions on the legislative authority of the states, and hoped that the new federal judiciary would impartially resolve whatever conflicts arose when the authority of the two levels of government somehow overlapped. In the end, the American states had inertia on their side. Each (with the possible exception of Georgia) had a substantial history of internal legislation behind it; all but two (Connecticut and Rhode Island) were operating under constitutions of government adopted since the outbreak of the revolution; each could command the loyalty of its residents (though on the frontiers, where boundaries were sometimes in dispute, squatter settlers were prepared to be more open-minded). If the states' erratic planetary orbits around the federal sun could be stabilized, to borrow a metaphor the framers themselves used, there was no reason to launch a frontal assault on their essential rights and powers.

The politics of compromise. This new structure of federalism emerged only gradually over the course of the Convention, as the product not of a grand design but rather of a set of prosaic decisions that cumulatively delineated the rough boundaries of national and state government. There were other questions, however, that provoked sharper conflicts and threatened to bring the convention not only to impasse but even to the point of dissolution.

These questions revolved around the fundamental problem of representation, which was simply to determine which entities—citizens, wealth, or whole communities—were entitled to a voice or a share in the composition of the national legislature. Under the Articles of Confederation, states were the fundamental unit of representation, and each state had a single vote in the unicameral Continental Congress. But Madison grounded his agenda for constitutional reform on other principles. In his view, the new government was to have genuine legislative power over the population, and not simply authority to recommend measures for its member states to implement as they saw fit. From this assumption, two conclusions followed: the new congress should be bicameral; and representation in both of its houses should follow some rule of proportionality (population, or wealth, or some combination of the two).

Madison insisted that the Convention resolve the representation question first, deferring until later decisions about the extent of the powers the new government would enjoy. That insistence set the tone for the first

seven weeks of debate. On one side, Madison and his allies argued that citizens were the true units of representation. Indeed, representation itself was made necessary by the inconvenience of assembling all the citizens once society expanded beyond the precincts of small, face-to-face communities. States, as such, did not have interests independent of those of their citizens; the interests of a state were only aggregates of the interests of their inhabitants. Nor would the future members of the new Congress ever vote on the basis of the size of the states they represented. One had only to look at the diverse social and economic characteristics of the three most populous states, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, to recognize that the danger of their colluding in the name of domination was specious. The only time when the size of a state would affect political behavior, ironically enough, was when one was debating whether size should affect rules of representation—that is, in the Convention itself, but not in future meetings of Congress.

Against these formidable and forcefully delivered arguments, the delegates from the smaller states stubbornly held to their claim that the states, as such, deserved equal representation in at least one house of a bicameral Congress. The grounds on which they staked this claim shifted, and to read Madison's notes of the deliberations, one would think that the spokesmen for the small states were repeatedly battered in debate. Sometimes they argued that the very existence of their states as autonomous polities was in jeopardy; sometimes they confessed that they would simply be foolish to surrender a right or advantage they already enjoyed under the Confederation; sometimes they suggested that the states deserved an equal vote because their governments would have to play some role in implementing national law. None of these arguments mattered as much as the refusal of the small state delegations to wilt in the face of the large states' rhetorical onslaught on behalf of proportional representation in both houses.

By early July the Convention had reached an impasse, and a committee, including the great sage Benjamin Franklin himself, met to propose a solution. Its report of July 5, in theory, laid the basis for the ostensible "compromise" that the Convention narrowly adopted eleven days later, in which the states retained an equal vote in the upper house of the new Congress. But in fact a better argument could be made that the basis for compromise lay in the other problem of representation to which the

delegates also had now to turn their attention: whether to apportion seats in the lower house on the basis of the free population alone, or somehow to factor slaves into the equation, if not as potential citizens, then at least as a form of property deserving special recognition.

Here, again, powerful theoretical reasons militated against allowing slaves to be counted in any form. They were not citizens in any sense of the term; they had no political existence except as the objects of legal regulation; and if they were to be counted as property, why not include other forms of property in the equation? In reply, delegates from southern states argued that slaves were indeed a special form of property whose labor contributed materially to the overall prosperity of the nation. Moreover, the southern states would clearly be a minority interest in the new republic. Would it be advisable for them to join a reconstituted Union if they did not receive some credit for their slaves, all the more so when the arguments that some northern delegates were prepared to use against slavery indicated a mounting hostility to the very institution on which southern prosperity, for better or decidedly worse, depended? Furthermore, the South was an initial minority region which (wrongly) believed that its future population growth would bring it more into parity with those regions where slavery was not prevalent. If a requirement for periodic reapportionment and a rule for counting population were not locked into the text of the Constitution, southern delegates asked, what was to stop the initial northern majority from acting to preserve its political power even when the social foundation on which it rested had evaporated?

However morally distasteful it was to accord slavery a place in the Constitution, this was one of those real interests that had to be accommodated if the Union was to be held together. Unlike the dispute between small and large states, which would not outlast the Convention itself, the divergence of interests between regions whose economies were based on slave and free labor was permanent and ineluctable. In the end, northern delegates acted realistically and pragmatically in settling upon the compromise that required a decennial census to be taken for purposes of reapportionment and, more important, that allowed three-fifths of the enslaved population be counted for allocating representatives among the states. This was a genuine compromise, even if it involved (as compromises often do) a sacrifice of moral principle to expedient ends.

This compromise preceded by days the final vote of July 16 on the Senate, and the relation between these two issues is critical to understanding the deeper politics of constitution-making at the Philadelphia Convention. The vote of July 16 was not a compromise of positions but a victory for one side and defeat for another. It passed by the narrowest margin possible: five states to four, with one divided: Massachusetts, which should have voted with the populous states. But in gaining their point, the small states also reinforced, in at least one sense, the principle underlying the previous compromise between the regions. Both decisions in effect recognized the legitimate claims of identifiable minorities, one regional, the other based on size of states; both rested on the claim that minorities needed some explicit mechanism of defense incorporated in the formula for representation. And psychologically, both guaranteed what could not have been taken entirely for granted before July 16: that the delegates collectively would discover the intestinal fortitude to see the project of constitutional reform through to completion.

For if the key vote on the Senate was not a compromise in its origins, it quickly became one with each passing day. In part, this came as the large state delegates, after grudgingly reconciling themselves to their defeat, realized that the Convention's critical decision was better portrayed as a compromise than anything else. But after seven weeks of wrangling, virtually all the delegates were too committed to the common project to turn back. Here the fact that the Convention was called for the single purpose of constitutional reform proved critical. Had the delegates simultaneously been acting as a revolutionary assembly, on the model of 1789, they could have shelved the project of reform and gone on with more urgent matters. But the delegates at Philadelphia had no other obligations. With each week, their commitment to the project grew more profound, and with it, their desire to present their decisions as the product of mutual accommodation and conciliation.

Issues avoided. There is another way, however, to think about the success of the American experiment in constitution-making in light of the roughly concurrent events in France. Were there problems on which the French foundered that the Americans managed to avoid or escape? Or to put the point another way: Did the American success rest upon advantages that the French did not enjoy? Thinking about the American case in the light of

Burke's diagnosis of the sources of the French political disaster suggests three distinguishing factors.

First, the Americans were spared the awkward dilemma of having to figure out what to do with a reigning monarch or how to fit a long-established monarchy into their new political order. They had solved that problem once and for all back in 1776. Although it is occasionally hinted that some Americans could envision some sort of monarchist restoration as one outcome of the weakening of political authority in the 1780s, the evidence for this is thin, and it is even more difficult to imagine how it could ever have transpired. That still left the Americans with the formidable task of constructing a national executive on republican principles, a subject that became the source of what Madison called "tedious and reiterated discussions" until the framers hit upon the electoral college. But however difficult it was for the framers to conceive the political dimensions of the presidency, that problem paled in comparison to the permanent dismemberment of the Capetian monarchy.

A second and more important advantage the Americans enjoyed lay in having had the religion problem, for all intents and purposes, already solved for them. Although a weak form of religious establishment survived in many of the American states, by European standards it was so diluted as to have lost its meaning. At the Federal Convention, the religion question was manifested only in the noncontroversial decision to prohibit religious tests for office-holding. By contrast, the major political blunder of the Assembly had been its confiscation of French church property and the reconstruction of the French Roman Catholic Church as a department of state, actions later followed by the adoption of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The religious policy of the National Assembly thus sharply divided the nation and permanently undermined the possibility of a united loyalty to the new constitutional structures. This situation allowed political opposition to become aligned with and reenforced by religious opposition. This turn of events allowed Burke and other opponents to portray the revolution as having sprung from "a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion" (94).

Third, for the American framers, the principal challenge of economic policy was to establish a government that could restore public credit and provide effective mechanisms for coordinating commercial policy among the states and with foreign nations. Whatever might be said about the

inequities of wealth in the United States and the pretensions of great merchants and land speculators, no one could doubt that the nation had an immense potential for development. Had the framers chosen to tackle the intractable problem of slavery, there would have been social inequities aplenty to correct. But that lay well beyond the realm of political possibility. In France, however, the assault on the privileges of crown, aristocracy, and church led to what Burke called a "revolution in property" whose consequences he could all too readily foresee (97).

Rousing the voice of the people. The framers understood, of course, that the Constitution stood a far better chance of ratification if their deliberations could be cast in the light of mutual accommodation and conciliation. That was why, down to the last day, they tried to persuade the three remaining dissenters, Elbridge Gerry, George Mason, and Edmund Randolph, to swallow their objections and sign the completed text along with the thirty-nine other members still present on September 17. The delegates rightly foresaw that the Constitution would be subject to a wide array of criticisms; the closer they themselves came to unanimity, the easier it would be to tar the Constitution's public critics as obdurate nay-sayers.

In appealing to the voice of the people as the final authority on the Constitution, the framers were also attempting to solve one of the deepest puzzles in contemporary political theory: how to convert the general idea of the social contract into a workable mechanism for the formation of a constitution. But the problem was not merely a theoretical one. All amendments to the Articles of Confederation were supposed to be proposed by the Continental Congress and then ratified by all thirteen of the state legislatures. The Convention might have reported its "amendments" to Congress, which could then, in turn, have transmitted them to the state legislatures. But the framers chose to abandon this procedure entirely. For one thing, they knew that unanimous approval by the state legislatures might well prove unattainable. Not only had the legislatures failed to ratify any of the amendments that Congress had previously proposed; they could not be expected to endorse a constitution that seemed likely to modify or circumscribe their own power. Moreover, the refusal of Rhode Island even to send a delegation to Philadelphia further confirmed that unanimity was fanciful.

Instead, the Convention fastened upon a different procedure. The Constitution would be referred to Congress, but Congress would only

transmit it unmodified to the state legislatures, which in turn would merely arrange for the election of special conventions to determine whether the Constitution would be ratified. The approval of only nine states would be required for the Constitution to take effect. And in passing judgment on the Constitution, these conventions would have to vote it up or down in its entirety. They could not adopt some parts and withhold approval on others, or make ratification contingent upon the adoption of desired changes.

In proposing to submit the Constitution to popularly elected conventions, the framers had three paramount purposes in mind. One, of course, was to make sure that the fate of the Constitution did not depend on the very institutions that would lose some measure of authority upon its adoption. A second was to rebut the objections that would arise from the reformers' deliberate failure to abide by the existing rules of amendment. If the people were indeed the ultimate source of all political authority, as the general principle of popular sovereignty seemed to imply, then a direct appeal to their voice would overcome most and perhaps all doubts about the legitimacy of what the framers were attempting to accomplish, especially if the state legislatures also consented to the proposed procedure. But third, and most important, a Constitution grounded on a direct expression of popular sovereignty, as opposed to the derivative approval of a legislature, could truly be recognized as the "supreme law of the land" asserted by Article V. As such, it would embody and indeed perfect the new American definition of a constitution: supreme fundamental law, adopted at one moment of historical time, that would thereafter serve to identify what government could and could not legitimately do in its name.

To obtain this result, however, it was imperative that the voice of the people speak clearly and unequivocally. That is why the framers of the Constitution and their Federalist supporters in the states insisted that the state ratification conventions had to approve or reject the Constitution in its entirety. The people could speak with a loud voice, but that voice could utter only one of two words: yes or no. And that is also why, in conventions where the two sides were roughly equal, Federalists struggled mightily to prevent their opponents from making the adoption of amendments a condition of that state's ratification. If forced to do so, Federalists would let the conventions propose whatever amendments they wished; but those amendments were only recommendations, not conditions.

Like so many other aspects of the American constitutional experiment, this strategy thus combined a keenly pragmatic approach to the difficulties of real politics with a profound and innovative grasp of some of the most difficult issues of constitutional theory. To recall Alexander Hamilton's oft-quoted observation in the opening paragraph of *The Federalist,* "that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force."[10] When revolution broke across France two years later, most Americans hoped that their wartime ally would prove that the United States need not stand alone in demonstrating this possibility. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Edmund Burke sought to explain why the varieties of "reflection and choice" exercised in France after 1789 were leading to results he found grimly predictable. But we can still regret that Burke's inattention to recent events in America did not allow him to frame his explanation in comparative terms. There were, after all, two great revolutions in the Atlantic world of the late eighteenth century, and the one that long seemed less revolutionary, and more properly constitutional, now appears to have enjoyed the greater staying power.

Notes

1. Pasquale Pasquino, *Sieyès et l'invention de la constitution en France* (Paris: O. Jacob, 1998).
2. See the materials collected in Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956); on Burke's speech on conciliation, see Philip Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), I, 3–6.
3. *The Federalist Papers,* Jacob E. Cooke, ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 3.
4. *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1806–20), vol. 29, cols. 365–66.
5. Ibid.
6. James Madison to George Washington, April 16, 1787, in *The Papers of James Madison,* Robert A. Rutland, et al., eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1962–75), IX, 382–87.
7. Title of Madison's memorandum of April 1787, in *Papers of Madison,* IX, 345–47.
8. Notes on ancient and modern confederacies, in *Papers of Madison,* IX, 3–24.
9. James Madison to James Monroe, October 5, 1786, *Papers of Madison,* IX, 140–41.
10. See note 3 above.

Democracy, Social Science, and Rationality Reflections on Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

ALAN WOLFE

I

Edmund Burke wrote his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* at the close of the eighteenth century, but his commentary on that event and the ideas informing it touch some of the most controversial issues in the relationship of the social sciences and democracy at the opening of the twenty-first century. The reason for this surprising situation is that Burke combined his attack on the policies of the French revolutionaries with a polemic against what he regarded as the intellectual foundations of their new departures.

The outbreak of the French Revolution followed upon the decades when across Europe various thinkers associated with the Enlightenment had asserted that the problems of politics, economics, and society were subject to a generally rationalistic analysis largely modeling itself after the natural sciences, most particularly mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Although many of those enlightened writers had been associated with a radical critique of eighteenth-century society and government, very few had favored anything resembling democratic solutions. Indeed, prior to the French Revolution it had been the so-called rulers of enlightened absolutism in central and eastern Europe who had been most drawn to such rational approaches to government, with some even directly consulting with Voltaire and Diderot.

Yet from the moment in late 1789 when the National Assembly began to reconstruct the political, economic, social, and religious life of France along lines associated with the enlightened critique of the Old Regime, the application of rational analysis to political and social problems became

deeply associated with liberal democracy. Burke himself was in large measure responsible for establishing this linkage through his powerful condemnation of the French National Assembly for imposing radically rational solutions upon their nation with little or no regard to history, previous forms of social association, or the feelings of those experiencing the application of the new policies. Yet the permutations of that relationship have held paradoxes that have sometimes confirmed Burke's insights and other times reversed them. In any case, his castigation of the dominance of rational social and political analysis continues to reverberate in Western thought.

II

No matter how associated in Burke's mind, the rational analysis of society —what we today call social science—need not be compatible with democracy. Political scientists can point to Plato and Aristotle as the first great students of political life, but even those who would reject Greek philosophy as too pre-modern to qualify for the term "science" can find early examples of systematic rational thinking about the state in such nondemocratic writers as Machiavelli and Hobbes. Economics, as modern a social science as one is likely to find, has more recent roots. Yet however contemporary its great eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century founders—Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus—seem to us, they wrote before the age of universal suffrage and even before the moderately liberal 1832 Great Reform Bill in Great Britain. Sociology, the most recent arrival to the pantheon of modern social science, became an academic discipline at the turn of the twentieth century, but many of its greatest original thinkers, including Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto, had serious qualms about the democracy that was emerging all around them.

Still, the age of democracy and the age of social science have overlapped, the one expanding seemingly in tandem with the other. In pre-democratic societies, art, literature, theology, and music flourished, but economics and sociology, to the degree that they existed at all, were subsumed under moral philosophy. Writers who could support themselves as professional economists emerged only in the nineteenth century. Other persons functioning as social scientists generally had to wait for the

establishment of twentieth-century academic departments to sustain a livelihood. Once social scientists successfully established themselves in the academic life of the twentieth century, they gained the ears of politicians, while the high culture of the arts and literature, unable to compete for popular taste, has often given way to rap music and daytime television.

The reason why modern democracy and social science have an elective affinity can be illustrated with one of the many methods used by contemporary social scientists: the public opinion survey. No one would bother to measure public opinion unless public opinion actually counted, and public opinion counts only in societies in which the voices of ordinary people are assumed to carry great significance. Public opinion researchers themselves have often pointed out that the totalitarian states of the twentieth century were hostile to their science (even as the use of polling techniques created fears of a manipulable electorate). Before the development of modern polling techniques, America was a democracy in the sense that its leaders were chosen by competitive election. But with the development of the poll, what had once been a mandate subject to many interpretations became a precisely measured gauge of public sentiment. Politicians can, if they so choose, disagree with those who elect them—as Edmund Burke hoped that, from time to time, they would do—but they can no longer claim not to know the views of those who elect them.

An even more direct relationship between democracy and social science can be found in the way statecraft is practiced in modern societies. Before the rise of modern democracy, government tended to be limited in its powers and, at least in the United States, concentrated in states and localities. In the early years of the twentieth century, progressives advocated a larger role for government in providing social services and in regulating business, and they turned, at first, to the states as laboratories for their ideas. Later, the New Deal solidified the relationship between the expansion of democracy, the growth of government, the respectability of social science, and the participation of social scientists themselves in government at both the state and the federal levels. President Roosevelt's programs sought to reach out to groups whose participation in American society was minimal, especially the rural poor. They eventually introduced Keynesianism to American public policy, and, with it, the notion that economies need not be subject to random fluctuations but could use economic data to plan their future. The expansion of one governmental agency after another—from

rural reclamation projects to the provision of aid to families with dependent children—meant a simultaneous expansion of those academic disciplines whose purpose was to furnish the techniques and the data underlying unprecedented governmental efforts.

World War II stimulated the growth of government and social knowledge even more than the Great Depression had. To draft young men from all over the society, to ensure that they were healthy enough to fight, and to give them basic skills all required general information about society's resources. Not only did political science furnish training for those attracted to government service, but also disciplines like psychology expanded to meet the needs of war. Symbolic of the entire mixture was the Strategic Bombing Survey—an effort that included many of America's most prominent social scientists—which helped identify targets for American planes in Europe. And when the war was over, countless troops were able to attend college, and thereby to furnish the means of academic expansion, as a result of the G.I. Bill.

Given this history, it seems obvious that social science would secure an important place in the political culture of a modern democracy like the United States in the years after World War II. There existed a powerful feedback mechanism whereby social scientists in universities studied social problems and then entered government service to carry out policies based on their research or that of colleagues. In turn, the creation of new government programs fostered research in the universities. Although both political science and sociology have seen a decline in their disciplines since the "golden age" they experienced in the 1950s, they remain nonetheless essential to any serious university curriculum today, in part because they are intertwined with the work of government and the business of democracy.

Social science has had its share of critics, but they tend to be marginal to its practice in the academic world. No university would consider itself complete these days unless its divisions included not just the humanities and the natural sciences but the social sciences as well. Economics remains an enormously popular major among undergraduates, and the skills of economists are determined essential to the management of complex systems. Even a relatively peripheral academic social science such as anthropology plays a role in contemporary government due first to overseas expansion and, more currently, the influx of immigrants from Third World countries to the relatively prosperous societies of Europe and North

America. Moreover, at the opening of this new century as much as at the close of the eighteenth, the proponents of the social sciences understand themselves as exercising reason and rationality upon their society and its politics.

III

So strong is the relationship between democracy and rational social science that few doubt the proposition that one can facilitate the other. Indeed, such has been the implicit assumption behind much political activism on the part of social scientists. But Edmund Burke almost immediately questioned the relationship between social science, public opinion, and the state that he saw emerging out of the French Revolution of 1789. A revolution, by definition, topples a system of political authority on the grounds that the principles that had governed that authority lack legitimacy, either because people no longer believe in them or because the authorities themselves have undermined them. In the case of France, the authority abolished by the revolution was monarchy, and the principles that had sustained the monarchy were beliefs in hereditary rule and the sanctity of tradition. With those beliefs gone, one of the first tasks facing the revolutionaries was finding new principles upon which a new system of government could be built.

Those principles, as Burke analyzed the problem, embraced what he regarded as at once an extensive and naïve belief in the power of human reason. On the surface of things, reliance on reason ought not in itself be unreasonable; the revolutionaries included among their number "men of considerable parts," Burke wrote, some of whom "display eloquence in their speeches and their writings" (141). But eloquence is one thing and wisdom is another, and by their very lack of prudence, Burke was convinced that the members of the National Assembly were anything but wise. Two kinds of political acts require no wisdom at all, and Burke rejected them both. One is an implacable conservatism that defends everything that exists, because such a point of view never requires that we make distinctions or evaluations. The other is an uninhibited radicalism that throws out everything that exists because it assumes, even before reflection, that anything old is outmoded.

Against both of these Burke advocated reform, declaring, “When the useful parts of an old establishment are kept, and what is superadded is to be fitted to what is retained, a vigorous mind, steady, persevering attention, various powers of comparison and combination, and the resources of an understanding fruitful in expedients are to be exercised” (143). Wisdom consists in knowing what is good and ought to be retained and what is problematic that needs to be changed. At the same time, wisdom demands that any changes we need to make we make in a tempered manner; to be wise we must be reflective, and to be reflective we must be patient. “It is one of the excellences of a method in which time is amongst the assistants, that its operation is slow and in some cases almost imperceptible,” he wrote (143). Wisdom, then, which is not the same as eloquence, is also not the same as intelligence. One can be brainy in the sense of having the mental capacity to create complicated systems, but if one does so rashly, without reference to history or feelings, one will not be wise.

As they went about creating a new government to replace the monarchy they overthrew, members of the National Assembly demonstrated a lack of wisdom in the very ambition of their plans. Motivated by considerations of rationality, they divided France by territory, by population, and by contribution. Burke invites his readers first to consider the territorial plans, which broke down the political structure of the country into departments, communes, and cantons. The idea behind the effort was to bring a sense of order to what, under the monarchy, had been a confusing system of overlapping jurisdictions. Division on the basis of population could not go quite so “smoothly” (147), but the planners nonetheless desired to create divisions equal in number so that people in one part of the country could not have more influence, or receive less governmental protection, than people in another merely because of ancient tradition. A third effort divided people by the contribution they make to society—for example, recognizing the contribution made by men of property. Here, according to Burke, the revolutionaries found themselves facing contradictions even they could not ignore, for if they were committed to the idea of dividing people by contribution, they would admit into their system an aristocracy—in this case, of wealth—which their other principles were determined to root out.

For Burke, such effort to borrow from a science like geometry or mathematics to organize the affairs of men is bound to lead to disaster. By upsetting the natural order of things, it leaves people as “strangers to one

another" (155), having nothing in common except as they both appear in the ambitions of the planners to control all things. In a remarkable passage directly criticizing the "geometrical policy" adopted by the National Assembly, Burke pondered the basis for human political associations and loyalties, observing, "We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighborhoods and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love of the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality" (167).

He further stressed, "In that general territory itself, as in the old name of provinces, the citizens are interested from old prejudices and unreasoned habits, and not on account of the geometric properties of its figure" (167). Human beings, Burke argues, are not like the unvarying objects studied by the natural sciences. Government deals with real people dwelling in long existing social relationships, and to understand real people, you have to understand human nature.

But human nature, which is never to be considered merely in an abstract sense, is not fixed by biology, as if human beings were just another kind of animal species. The political philosophers of the ancient world knew that men had a "second nature," what today we would likely call culture, that added to their original endowments. When the influence of society is added to the influence of nature, human beings become the complicated creatures they are: "Thence arouse many diversities amongst men, according to their birth, their education, their professions, the periods of their lives, their residence in towns or in the country, their several ways of acquiring and of fixing property . . . all of which rendered as it were so many different species of animals" (156).

A wise legislator recognizes this diversity among human beings, but ambitious planners, determined to set the world right, believe that, for purposes of their plans, any one human being can be replaced by any other. "He, the economist," Burke wrote, "disposer, and shepherd of his own kindred, subliming himself into an airy metaphysician, was resolved to know nothing of his flocks but as men in general" (157). For that reason, the planners of Burke's time, in reducing everything to matters of substance

and quantity, misunderstood the subjects they would presume to rule, for human beings are more than the sum of their parts.

But more than misunderstanding is at stake here, Burke argues. To strip people of those inherited characteristics that have evolved over time, and to place them into categories rationally chosen by some outside experts, is to create a new form of tyranny over men: "They have attempted to confound all sorts of citizens, as well as they could, into one homogeneous mass; and then they divided this their amalgama into a number of incoherent republics. They reduce men to loose counters, merely for the sake of simple telling, and not to figures whose power is to arise from their place in the table" (157). In his fear that the abolition of long existing loyalties and sentiment would cause France to decay "into the dust and powder of individuality" (82), Burke anticipated what in the years after World War II would be called the theory of mass society. The essence of this theory is that modern individuals require a stratum of intermediate associations between the individual and the state. When those institutions are weakened, citizen and state come into direct contact with each other, and that is a contest the citizens will inevitably lose, for they will stand naked before the state, unable to protect themselves against its tendency to rule over them.

Thus it comes to pass that something seemingly reasonable on its face—a desire to know more about human beings so that their needs and desires can be more easily met—turns into something nightmarish. In order to obtain basic knowledge about people, we first classify them into categories. All governments do this, Burke writes, even monarchies, although monarchies, he points out, have less need for classification than do republics. Classification by itself is not evil; done well, it can protect people against despotism. But the rash and arbitrary ways it was done by the French National Assembly made Burke fearful for the future of France. "If the present project of a republic should fail," he wrote, "all securities to a moderated freedom fail along with it; all the indirect restraints which mitigate despotism are removed, insomuch that if monarchy should ever again obtain an entire ascendancy in France, under this or under any other dynasty, it will probably be, if not voluntarily tempered, at setting out, by the wise and virtuous counsels of the prince, the most completely arbitrary power that has ever appeared on earth. This is to play a most desperate game" (157–58). Burke was fearful than any arbitrary system of classification put into place to satisfy the needs of reformers would be left

in place long after those reformers passed from the scene, creating the possibility that new despotic political authority would eventually put things back together to serve entirely different needs, a situation that did eventuate with the rise of Napoleon.

In Burke's *Reflections* we are drawn a picture of the relationship between activist social science and government far different from the optimistic scenarios developed by modern social scientists themselves. It is so self-evident to contemporary social scientists that knowledge and planning are good in themselves that they rarely stop to question those assumptions. An analogy with medicine might be appropriate. The more we know about the biology of human beings, a believer in the use of rational knowledge would say, the better we can control disease and extend the lifespan. Such knowledge, however, cannot help us answer the question of why life is important or meaningful in the first place, and this turns out to matter because individuals who have strong ethical and religious understandings of the meaning of life, some commentators believe, tend to live longer than those who do not. What is true for the human body seems, by extension, to be just as true for the body politic. Policy planners believe that if we know more about the extent and causes of poverty we can do a better job of eliminating poverty. But it may also be true that people remain in poverty because they are alienated from a world they do not understand, in which case a commitment to increasing people's sense of purpose and their sense of obligation to others may be more helpful in overcoming poverty than a direct infusion of funds. It comes as something of a shock to a modern sensibility to hear an argument that problems can be solved by attacking their manifestations rather than their underlying causes, but it is a point that Burke would have understood. There are risks in being too rational, Burke tells us, and our zeal to be so in any case could be taken as an indication that he might be right.

IV

Burke was a conservative—indeed, he was the founder of modern conservatism—and his criticisms of grandiose plans premised on assumptions of human rationality were kept alive by a variety of twentieth-century conservative writers. Among the most important of them were the

British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott, who warned against both ambitious plans and the ambitious intellectual agendas that often accompany them; Leo Strauss, a German refugee to the United States, who wrote a scathing critique of the empirical side of American social science; and those American neo-conservatives who founded a magazine called *The Public Interest* premised upon the idea that public policy often produced results radically different from those intended by its advocates. For writers like these, radicals and liberals, with their naïve understanding of human nature, for all their talk of equality and liberty, were anticipating rule by the experts in which they themselves would ipso facto become the rulers. Indeed, Burke himself had repeatedly sought to demonstrate that the National Assembly, for all its rhetoric about the rights of man, had come to function as an arbitrary authority lacking any substantial connection with the people it sought to govern on the alleged basis of reason. The radicals of the National Assembly refused to apply self-criticism to themselves. Oakeshott and Strauss, among others, believed such was also the situation with twentieth-century government by experts in social science.

Yet by the second half of the twentieth century, in an ironic development that Burke might have appreciated, it turned out to be radicals active in the political movements of the 1960s who developed sharp and extensive critiques of rationality and social knowledge strikingly similar to his own. Few of them had read Burke's view about the French National Assembly, but their writings about the planning and execution of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam struck nearly identical themes. The planners of the Vietnam War were described by one journalist as the "best and the brightest." Bearing advanced degrees from America's most prestigious universities, they approached warfare with the abstractions of game theory, mathematical modeling, and other methodological advances developed in the social sciences. Like the members of the National Assembly, they paid little attention to the history of the Vietnamese; indeed, the country was divided into North and South Vietnam by a line as arbitrary as any drawn in 1789. And, as Burke assumed for the future of France, all such efforts, by ignoring history, tradition, and the mysteries of human nature, failed miserably to achieve their objective.

The failure of the war in Vietnam was also, at least for some, a failure of social science, for among the planners of the war were political scientists and economists from elite universities, trained in "cutting edge" social

science methodologies. Watching them in their arrogance violently depopulate Vietnamese villages in the name of freedom and rationality, radical graduate students and younger faculty became convinced that efforts to study human beings based on methods imported from the natural sciences, having failed in Vietnam, would likely fail in other areas as well. In one social science discipline after another, radical caucuses were formed to protest policies like Vietnam and to search for alternative ways of thinking about the creation and dissemination of social science knowledge.

The critique of social science developed by such radicals owed little to Burke; indeed, the philosophical basis of their criticism of social science methods came from the inheritors of the French revolutionary tradition that Burke despised. In particular, the French radical Michel Foucault, carrying forward the spirit of the most radical elements of the French Revolution, became the leading critic of social science rationality—indeed, of any kind of pursuit of rational knowledge. For Foucault, the accumulation of knowledge is a political act dedicated to a political end. Precisely because modern people are unlikely to accept forms of authority rooted in superstition or hereditary rule, they will be more likely to accept forms of authority clothed in the language of science. Whatever the subject—sexuality, criminology, economics, demography—Foucault was convinced that knowledge would be used by those in power to control those who lived at the margins of society. "The disciplines," he wrote, using a term meant to include systematic knowledge about social life, "are the ensemble of minute technical inventions that made it possible to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power which, in order to make them useful, must control them."[1]

Foucault, unlike Burke, had little respect for tradition, and he lacked Burke's linguistic eloquence, but in passages like this he came close to arguing, as Burke did in the period right after the onset of the French Revolution, that classifiers need systems for containing people in order to exercise tyranny over them. Foucault's polemic demonstrates the often ignored fact that Burke's critique of the application of unbridled rationality actually stands separate from his championing of tradition. One can accept or reject one without necessarily accepting or rejecting the other. And Burke's faith in tradition, which often finds little appreciation in our own day, has been used to blunt the ongoing power of his critique of modern

political and social rationality, which contains its own possibilities of a modern radicalism.

Foucault was not alone in his suspicions about knowledge. Ideas similar to his could be found in a book written in 1961 by a maverick city planner named Jane Jacobs called *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs upheld the spontaneity and naturalness of urban life against those city planners who would tear up functioning neighborhoods and replace them with high-rise buildings, premised on the notion that urban spontaneity was irrational and inefficient. History rarely proves social critics unambiguously right or wrong, but history has been kind to Jacobs, for nearly everyone involved with urban life now believes that the rational planners were engaged in very irrational activities because they did not appreciate the way order can be created spontaneously by real people.

More recently along similar lines, James Scott, a political scientist deeply interested in agrarian societies, published *Seeing Like a State* (1998) in which he, very much in the tradition of Jacobs and Foucault—and to some degree in the tradition of Burke—argued that bureaucrats with vast planning ambitions, such as those who collectivized agriculture in the Soviet Union, inevitably try to limit, if not crush, popular objections to their plans. Scott, also in a manner similar to Burke's critique of the departmental boundaries decreed by the National Assembly, pointed to the manner in which the application of modern cartography constitutes one of the most powerful weapons of state rationality overcoming traditional societies. Scott might well agree with Burke who, warning two centuries ago against too zealous a pursuit of the creation of a better world, advised, "If circumspection and caution are a part of wisdom, when we work only upon inanimate matter, surely they become a part of duty, too, when the subject of our demolition and construction is not brick and timbers but sentient beings, by the sudden alteration of whose state, condition, and habits multitudes may be rendered miserable" (143). It was exactly the lack of such circumspection that Scott and Jacobs so extensively explored. But their voices have actually been among a minority of those in the social sciences suggesting skepticism about a zeal for rationality in social policy.

From the vantage point of the 1970s it might have seemed safe enough to have predicted that a rising generation of social scientists, radicalized by the war in Vietnam and influenced by writers like Foucault and Jacobs, would, upon assuming their positions in the university world, shift the focus

of academic disciplines away from models that assumed rationality and scientific objectivity. Such alternative models did exist in the literature and history of the social sciences. Economists and political scientists had once called themselves "institutionalists," by which they meant that they studied as carefully as possible how firms or legislatures operate in the real world. As Burke had shown, an appreciation of history could and did inform the social sciences, and, as the rise of feminism and African-American studies would demonstrate, one did not need to be a conservative to appreciate history. The greatest social scientists of the past had gotten along rather well without relying on sophisticated abstract methodologies and theories, and their success was available as well.

Yet anyone predicting the death of theoretical rationality would have been wrong. In the humanistic disciplines, in fact, the exact opposite development took place. True, Foucault, along with other French left-wing writers such as Ronald Barthes and Jacques Derrida, would exercise a tremendous influence on those disciplines, especially English and comparative literature departments. But their ideas were used to move away from a model of the scholar as a "belle lettrist" to one in which "theory" would be given an exalted position. Before long, radical professors in the humanities were claiming to be professionals, if not scientists, writing in language accessible only to other scholars in their discipline. They presented themselves not as rejecting theory but as infusing good theory where bad theory or no articulated theory had once reigned.

Much the same development took place in the social sciences, if in different ways. In the spirit of Foucault (or the American radical Noam Chomsky), left-wing caucuses protested the use of social science knowledge as a form of power. Yet it was not the scientific pretensions of such knowledge that bothered them, merely the use to which they assumed the knowledge was being put. If anything, radical social scientists claimed (and continue to claim) to be more scientific than "mainstream" ones. One need not go further than the discipline of economics to understand how this took place. Unlike the other social sciences, economics had a towering radical figure in its past to whom the 1960s generation could turn: Karl Marx. But there began the problem. Marx, for all of his thundering pronouncements about capitalist contradictions, was neither a moral nor a religious thinker; Marxism, he asserted, was the genuinely scientific form of economics, while alternative approaches to economics were merely

ideological. His late twentieth-century disciples continued to take him at his word. They had little interest in reviving the kinds of Christian and utopian forms of socialism on which Marx had heaped contempt. Instead, they would rely on the dominant social models of the day. For a sociologist such as Erik Olin Wright, for example, Marx's theory of class conflict could be modified in ways enabling the sociologist to draw up complex charts demonstrating the class positions of different individuals in a society. For a significant number of Marxist economists, the same emphasis on rational choice associated with conventional academics could be used in an effort to measure the degree of exploitation under capitalism.

Economics is the key discipline for tracing these developments, since one social science discipline after another turned to economics as the appropriate way to study human behavior. Although economics once had a nonmathematical side—the influential Harvard economist Joseph Schumpeter never bothered to learn mathematics—in the years after World War II mathematics became essential to the discipline's self-understanding. If we assume that individuals are rational creatures who calculate the benefits and losses to be obtained by acting one way or another, we can then model their behavior using mathematical techniques. Not all people will be rational in their actual behavior, economists conceded, but, at least among the most theoretically inclined in the field, economists were not all that interested in actual behavior. First let us get the models right, they said, and then we can apply them to reality.

The influence of rational choice spread to all academic disciplines and approaches. Economists themselves, determined to demonstrate the universality of their discipline, relied on rational choice techniques to study financial markets or unemployment, but they also extended them to areas far removed from the buying and selling of commodities. We can understand marriage and divorce, abortion and adoption, religion, altruism, friendship, crime, and community life—the traditional areas of concerns of sociology—better than the sociologists can, they claimed, and many sociologists agreed. But the strongest influence of rational choice theory outside of economics took place in the academic discipline closest to the questions with which Edmund Burke had dealt: the field of political science.

American political science had never been a unified discipline. Once composed of political philosophers, specialists in international relations,

lawyers interested in constitutions, and students of political institutions, political science historically claimed scientific status only in the most loosely defined of ways. As such, political science was known as a discipline with an interest in real-world events; one of its great early twentieth-century practitioners, Woodrow Wilson, would become president of the United States. Students took courses in political science because they were interested in careers related to politics. Curiosity about power and how it works was a requisite for entering the field. All this changed in the 1950s, when "behaviorism" came to dominate the field. By studying such behaviors as the way people voted, political scientists came to believe that their discipline could at least be as scientific as psychology, developing hypotheses that could be tested by relying on statistical techniques. Before long, the successful political scientist, interested mainly in statistical models or data collection, lost interest in actual politics, as if knowing something about real-world events would taint the objectivity required of a serious scientist.

When radical caucuses developed in the 1960s, they criticized the behavioral revolution in political science, and with some success. Before long, behaviorism would crumble. As it did, however, it was not replaced by a more "humanistic" political science but by an even more "scientific" one. Originating at institutions like the University of Rochester and the California Institute of Technology, rational choice theory quickly spread to departments at universities such as Harvard and Stanford. Entrenched in the elite universities, it then came to dominate the academic journals and to define prestige at universities one or two steps down in the pecking order from the top. Within the political science profession adherents to rational choice theory functioned very similarly to the Parisian literary cabal as pictured and decried by Burke. They simply worked to close out those with rival points of view from publication in professional journals and appointments in major universities, a situation that has recently caused considerable strife among political science associations.

Unlike the members of the National Assembly criticized by Burke, rational choice theorists have not led a political revolution; their influence is confined to the academic world. But within that world, they often speak and act as revolutionaries. For one thing, they show little respect for history and tradition. The late sociologist Robert K. Merton once pointed out the existence of two competing ways of thinking about theory in the social

sciences. One way emphasizes the present in relationship to the past. It views contemporary economics as following in the footsteps of Adam Smith, or contemporary political science as addressing the same questions asked by Hobbes and Locke. The other tradition approaches the history of a discipline the way physicists or biologists treat the historical figures in their disciplines: as anachronistic. Scientists no longer read Mendel or Newton to look for insights; so radical are the changes in their disciplines that even recently published papers can be out of date. It is this second way of thinking about theory that motivates rational choice social scientists, many of whom post their latest papers on the internet, unwilling to wait the year or two that publication in a journal usually requires. In other words, they treat the past as an obstacle to the future, much as the French revolutionaries did.

Second, rational choice theorists, like the revolutionaries of Burke's day, are so convinced of the truth of their perspective that they treat scholars with other perspectives with intemperate impatience. Because rational choice theory is presumed to be scientific, its practitioners feel no need to be pluralistic. There is no sense in encouraging a wide variety of viewpoints if some viewpoints are simply wrong; biologists do not seek to hire those who believe that the Bible tells us all we need to know about creation just to have a clash of opinions available. Rational choice theorists feel the same way about humanistic social science as biologists feel about creationists. Since there is nothing to learn from Plato or Rousseau about the decisions made by human beings today, there is no reason to teach Plato or Rousseau —or, for that matter, Burke—in a political science curriculum. Many departments of political science still have political philosophers, in part because they have tenure and in part because they are needed to teach undergraduates. But rational choice theorists clearly prefer to hire more rational choice theorists when new positions become available. They are convinced that their tools are the only appropriate tools by which human political behavior can be understood.

Third, rational choice theorists share the conviction of the French revolutionaries that human nature consists in one thing and one thing only. Human beings, in their view, are complicated calculating machines, but if we can understand the principles by which they make their calculations, we can understand them. In order to understand rational creatures properly, we can dispense with anything transcendental about them, for their religious

life, their quest for meaning, the symbols that motivate them can all be broken down into quantifiable elements that can be analyzed by the tools of rational choice.

In certain respects, rational choice theorists stand at the fulfillment, almost the fulfillment in caricature, of Burke's jeremiad against the loss of a qualitative appreciation of human nature when he announced so memorably, if stridently, "All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion" (66). Burke associated this outlook with "the principles of this mechanistic philosophy" whereby reason banished "the affection" but proved "incapable of filling their place" (66). Burke believed, and events proved him right, that in France such thinking would lead to the execution of the royal family and of others. In regard to the mechanical thinkers of his own day, he declared, "In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows" (66).

We do not need to adopt conclusions so dark as Burke's in respect to the application of rationality in political theory, but there can be no question that he did grasp the reductionist tendency of such an approach to political and social life. For the rational choice theorist, human beings, although more complicated, are no different from other animal species, and before long, these theorists found themselves borrowing from biology. Some versions of rational choice theory hold that there is much to learn about human behavior from studying that most rational creature called the computer, although others doubt that human beings will ever become as intelligent as the machines they have built.

Edmund Burke revisited his reflections about the Revolution in France two years after his essay in "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs." In that pamphlet he wrote that "the lines of morality are not like the lines of mathematics." This is because, as Burke put it, "Nothing universal can be rationally affirmed on any moral or political subject."[2] To believe otherwise is to fail to recognize the virtue of prudence, which asks us to be cautious before making sweeping claims about the nature of the world. Burke's words have not stopped many contemporary thinkers from making sweeping claims indeed. All human behavior, they insist, including

morality, can be reduced to the working out of scientific laws. If so, then what Burke feared, but what radical thinkers like Michel Foucault anticipated, will be the result: the end of man as we have known him.

V

Edmund Burke believed that the use of reason to sort people into categories would eventually expose them to tyranny. In regarded to the new French constitution he thought the "bad, metaphysics," "bad, geometry," and "false, proportionate arithmetic" (154) of the National Assembly had led it to treat France "exactly like a country of conquest" (155). Can it be said that the development of rational choice theories, and other similar methodologies in the social sciences, will similarly produce antidemocratic results for society as a whole?

At one level, this would be too great a claim to make. What takes place in academic political science departments these days is of little interest outside those departments. Whatever tyranny may exist is thus exercised only against others in the profession. In the 1950s and 1960s, social science departments were strongly influenced by their geographic location. In the Midwest, sociology and political science was essentially quantitative in nature. Its practitioners analyzed empirical data with the help of statistical techniques and published their findings in academic journals. On both the East and West Coasts, by contrast, sociology and political science departments included at least a few public intellectuals. Sometimes refugees from Nazi Germany, sometimes trained as journalists, these were individuals who wrote books rather than articles. Their focus was often on grand themes of contemporary political life, such as the end of ideology or the future of democracy. Their books were read by nonacademics, and, in rare cases, their faces might appear on the cover of national newsmagazines. These were scholars who believed that they had an obligation to speak to the condition of their society.

Moreover, because they understood themselves as enmeshed in and speaking to their larger society, these public intellectuals displayed the kind of sensitivity to the intricacies of public life that Burke ascribed in an idealized image to the legislators of the ancient world. According to Burke those ancient legislators had eschewed easy abstract theory that by its

nature ignored the difficulties and intricacies of human nature and human society. Instead, he declared, “They had to do with men, and they were obliged to study human nature. They had to do with citizens, and they were obliged to study the effects of those habits which are communicated by the circumstances of civil life” (156). The public intellectuals of America, and for that matter Europe in the quarter century after World War II, exercised just exactly that kind of sensibility to the various people dwelling in the societies upon which they commented. They almost gloried in the particularities and even difficulties of those societies. Deeply aware of the results of a different kind of politics in central and eastern Europe, they resisted the leveling impulse of both the contemporary authoritarian visions and the excessive exercise of reason in the cause of political and social reconstruction.

Rational choice theorists do not feel that sense of obligation or of intellectual self-restraint. Committed to neither democratic nor antidemocratic politics, they understand themselves as engaged in highly specialized work that has little immediate application. About this, they are correct. With rational choice, all interest in actual politics seemed to disappear. The politicians Burke criticized may well have had dangerous and unworkable plans. But at least they wanted involvement in the world where their ideas and policies met considerable internal and external resistance. Today’s rational choice theorists pursue rationality for its own sake and in this respect differ from all of their philosophical predecessors, from Plato to Hobbes to Rousseau.

Still, despite its spurning real-life applications, the triumph of rational choice theory in the academy does have real-life consequences along the lines suggested by Burke. To be sure, much of what is generally called “applied” social science takes place outside of academic institutions, in Washington think tanks, liberal and conservative foundations, and private corporations. But in part because of competition from such venues, universities, not oblivious to the possibility of conducting research that would receive foundation support, began to create schools of public policy designed to focus directly on real-world issues such as poverty, housing, agriculture, and foreign policy. (Such schools of public policy were in many ways an extension of the land-grant public universities that had been charged by state legislatures with carrying out practical research in such areas as animal husbandry and soil conservation.)

In addition, academic notions such as rational choice theory, as confined as they may be to the academy, do have spillover effects into society as a whole. Given the enormous size of the educational sector in the United States, what happens in the academic world is bound to get a certain amount of attention, and it is therefore not surprising that many Americans who would never read a social science journal come to believe that people are really calculating machines toting up the costs and benefits of what they do. Perhaps the best example comes from a non–social science discipline: biology. Books written by sociobiologists (now called evolutionary psychologists) often deal with subjects of great public interest: adultery, rape, crime, even altruism. When sociobiologists, and the social scientists influenced by them, begin to argue that sexual philandering is caused by the fact that "selfish genes" are driven to maximize their reproductive capacity, it is not long before the logic of rational choice comes to influence how people think about more mundane issues. Maybe, one politician suggested, we ought to use economic incentives, including direct cash payments, to encourage children to read. Indeed, others have suggested, we can solve the problem of too many abortions by offering financial incentives to pregnant women so that they will bring their babies to term and then sell them on the open market. Rational choice theory offers a relatively simple way to make sense of a complex world, and for that reason alone it has its own source of appeal, even if it also indicates how absurd it can be to treat all social relations as economic in nature.

Because they offer a possible explanation of how the world works, academic theories, including those associated with rational choice, can even become substitutes for religion. Sociobiology in particular has ambitions along these lines. Although sociobiology developed as a way of explaining evolution among nonhuman creatures, its key insights came to be applied to human beings and their cultural products, including their use of language, their morality, and their propensities toward war or peace. One sociobiologist, Edward O. Wilson, has argued for what he calls "consilience," the idea that there can be a unified form of knowledge capable of explaining everything in the world, so that human behavior, including religion and art, will one day be reduced to the study of biochemistry. For a writer like Burke, who, when he was not writing about politics, spoke with awe about the nature of the sublime, evolutionary psychology would be the worst possible confirmation of his fears about the

modern world. For the whole point of the enterprise is to explain the sublime in terms of the profane, not the other way around.

As a description of the illusions associated with belief in rationality, Burke's attack on the planners of his time is strikingly prophetic. If American academic life is any indication, assumptions about human behavior are increasingly borrowed from the natural sciences, and no matter how counterintuitive they may seem, they continue to flourish. If one has doubts about such understandings, one can turn to Edmund Burke to recapture the idea that wisdom and intelligence are not the same thing. To develop the kinds of mathematical models favored by contemporary academics, one must surely be intelligent. But exclusive reliance on such models to understand creatures whose behavior cannot be so modeled seems lacking in elementary wisdom. Burke urged, "The true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility" and "ought to live and respect his kind, and to fear himself" (143). The general thrust of rational choice theory must by its very nature constrict such sensibility and eschew such fear of self on the part of the social planner. Burke had also contended that "political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means" whereby "mind must conspire with mind" (143). It was the absence of such social interaction on the part of planners and those upon whom their plans were imposed that accounts in part for the failure of much modern social policy.

As insightful as Burke was on these issues, however, he did not offer much of a credible alternative. "You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age," he wrote in the *Reflections,* "I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings, that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices" (74). One can admire Burke for defending prejudice, for even in his own day, his was far from a popular position. It is another case of needing to distinguish between his critique and his prescription without allowing the difficulties associated with the latter to overwhelm the insight of the former. But Burke's defense of prejudice reminds us why we believe in reason in the first place. "Prejudice . . . previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, skeptical, puzzled, and unresolved," Burke wrote (74).

Yet there is something to be said for skepticism, especially as it concerns ideas that have been passed down, with little examination, from generation to generation. Social science can have its own prejudices, but one reason social science and democracy have been associated is that the skepticism of the one is compatible with the skepticism of the other. Liberal democracies are premised on the idea that people can know what is in their own interest better than monarchs or aristocrats can. For that reason, the citizens of liberal democracies are encouraged to examine received ideas skeptically so that, when they make up their minds, they do so on the basis of what corresponds with their own perceptions and experience. Governance in liberal democracies is a process of mutual adjustment rather than a question of authority and obedience. It is as if government and the people are constantly testing each other, with people asking their rulers to take into account their views while rulers ask the people for permission to make rules in the first place.

In this atmosphere, social science, understood as a way of testing our ideas about reality, has an important role to play. Citizens of liberal democracies require knowledge about the world, not necessarily to abolish all their prejudices, but to find out whether their dispositions correspond with the world outside themselves. Venerable traditions that cannot make such a correspondence find themselves dying out in liberal democratic societies. The idea, for example, that the children of immigrants to the United States could never be true scholars of English literature—an idea that long justified anti-Semitism in the humanities departments of Ivy League universities—could not be defended against the obvious love of English demonstrated by so many novelists whose parents were indeed immigrants, whether from Russia and Italy years ago or from India and China today.

At its best, social science provides the tools to overcome prejudice. Recent work by social scientists demonstrating the growing size of an African-American middle class, for example, not only undermines the prejudices of those who believe that blacks are inferior, it also undercuts the views of those who claim that American society is too racist to allow for any significant black advancement. Other work by social scientists has made the claim that Americans are less civically engaged than they were earlier in their history, and while debates range about the extent of the phenomenon, few would disagree with the finding that Americans pay less

attention to public life than to private life. If we worry about such phenomena as out-of-wedlock births, crime rates, and increases in divorce —as well we should—it is because social science knowledge is skeptical of the idea that social life is always improving. Properly understood, social science knowledge can protect people against revolutionary urges from both the left and the right. On the one hand, the constant discoveries by social scientists that programs and policies have unanticipated consequences—that, for example, efforts to eliminate poverty can enrich a middle class of bureaucrats more than they help the poor—can act as a check on the utopianism of planners who want to change the world. On the other hand, the fact that social knowledge often tells us that things are not as bad as we may believe—that, for example, people who routinely do not go to church nonetheless consider themselves religious believers—warns against the prophecies of conservatives who believe that society has become too decadent to be saved. Social science at its best contributes to reform, precisely what Burke advocates in his *Reflections*.

None of this means that social science cannot be abused, nor that it cannot develop into a prejudice of its own. Indeed, the kinds of rational choice theory popular in the academic world are a kind of prejudice. For all their insistence on science, rational choice theorists rarely question their own assumptions, and they make arguments that bear more resemblance to ideology than to science. But to make a distinction that Burke surely would, these failings are not due to their claims for social scientific status but to the fact that they practice social science badly. For good science is often associated with humility, a sense that the world escapes our understanding of it, so that any truths we discover are tentative. That kind of awe in the face of the world's mysteries which motivates genuine scientists—an awe for which Burke would have great respect—is missing from the kind of social scientists who believe that they can gain unvarying insights into the nature of human behavior from the application of scientific explanations formulated in the context of understanding rats or bees.

The period right after a revolution seems to inspire some of the greatest reflections we have about both the world and our methods of understanding it. If Edmund Burke's suspicion of a certain kind of reason was inflamed by the French Revolution of 1789, another series of revolutionary events—World War I and the ensuing Russian Revolution of 1917—was the backdrop for Max Weber's reflections on science and politics as vocations.

Weber, like Burke, was suspicious of those who seized political power and justified their seizure on the grounds that they would be doing so many good things for society. Beware, Weber wrote, of those who uphold what he called an "ethic of ultimate ends," by which he meant efforts to create the Kingdom of God here on earth at this very minute. Instead, he insisted on the importance of an "ethic of responsibility," in which those who held the power of the state in their hands would become aware of the awesome violence at their disposal and resist any acts that might tempt them to use it.[3]

Scientists, including social scientists, like politicians, also required an ethic of responsibility, according to Weber. But because they must be free to pursue their intellectual curiosity, such responsibility cannot be imposed upon them. It can nonetheless come about when scientists recognize that they have a vocational mission, that they are bound by duty to act in a responsible manner worthy of the science in whose name they speak. Such an ethic of responsibility is often missing among those who claim that they have discovered the secret to human behavior. It is even more absent when such social scientists take it upon themselves to try to develop vast and ambitious systems for organizing the world around them. Edmund Burke was right to warn his readers that such intellectual ambitions can be dangerous. The danger comes, however, not from the quest for knowledge itself, but from those who lack all humility and respect for human beings in the way they seek it.

Notes

1. Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 220.

2. "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edumund Burke,* F. W. Raffety, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 5: 19.

3. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* C. Wright Mills and Hans Gerth, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 127.

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Glossary Index

Entries refer to the text of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* excluding his footnotes. Terms not defined here are defined in the editor's footnotes.

Abdication:
Ability:
Abominations:
Abstract: perfection; principles; right; rule
Abstraction, metaphysical:
Abstractions:
Absurdity:
Abuse(s):
Academies:
Acquisition(s):
Actor(s):
Adventurers:
Affection(s):
Africa:
Agriculture:
Agrippina (15?–59 C.E.): mother of Nero;
Aiguillon, Emmanuel-Armand de Vignerot du Plessis-Richelieu, Duke d' (1720–1788): French foreign minister under Louis XV, later a supporter of the early Revolution who eventually sought refuge in England;
Aix, Archbishop of (Jean de Dieu Raymond de Boisgelin de Cucé, 1732–1804): a French reformist churchman who served briefly as

president of the National Assembly in late 1789 and later sought political refuge in England;

Alarm(s):

Alembert, Jean Le Rond d' (1717?–1783): French philosophe;

Allegiance:

Ambition:

Amnesty:

Amulet: a charm against evil;

Anabaptists of Münster: radical German Protestants who, from the mid-1520s to the mid-1530s, established a theocracy in Münster practicing the holding of property and wives in common;

Anarchy:

Ancestors:

Animal(s):; existence; life; religious

Anne, Queen (1665–1714): English monarch;

Antiquaries:

Antiquity:

Apostle of Liberty:

Apparitions:

Appetites: cannibal; disorderly; insatiable

Arbitrary, power(s):

Arcanum: something hidden or made into a mystery;

Areopagus: hill on which the highest tribunal of Athens met;

Aristocracy:; established; of the rich; tyrannous

Aristotle (384–322 B. C. E.): ancient Greek philosopher;

Arithmetic:; political

Arithmetical: arrangement, spirit of; constitution; process

Arithmeticians: metaphysic

Army(ies):

Arrogance:

Artificers:

Arts:

Asia:

Assassination(s):

Assassins:
Assemblies:
Assembly, spirit of the:
Assignats: French bonds issued by the National Assembly backed by the income from the lands of the French Church confiscated by the Assembly;
Association(s):
Atheism:
Atheistic libelers:
Atheistical fanaticism, spirit of:
Atheistical fathers:
Atheists:
Athens:
Attachment(s):; principle of
Attornies:
Authority:
Avarice:

Bailly, Jean Sylvain (1736–1793): Mayor of Paris in 1789, later executed;
Balnibarbi: land visited by Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* with capital of Lagardo, site of an academy of projectors who pursue ludicrous experiments in the name of natural knowledge;
Bank of discount: Caisse d'Escompte, a French bank formed by government authority late in the last decades of the old regime;
Bank of England: central bank charted 1694;
Bank, the: refers to the Bank of England
Bank-paper:
Bankruptcy:
Bankrupts:
Barbarism:
Barbarous ages:
Bastille: prison in Paris symbolizing monarchical absolutism and torn down by a mob on July 14, 1789;
Benevolence:; mechanism of politic; political; speculative; voluntary

Berne, Republic of: Swiss canton with an oligarchic government contrasting with French revolutionary republicanism;

Bill of rights:

Bishop: the head of either a Roman Catholic or Church of England diocese;

Blackstone, William (1723–1780): major eighteenth-century commentator on English law;

Blood: denoting lineage; denoting vitality; suggesting violence

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John, Viscount (1678–1751): Tory minister under Queen Anne and author of controversial works on natural religion;

Bordeaux: city in eastern France;

Britons:

Brunswick line: German House of Hanover that came to the English throne through the Act of Settlement of 1701 because of lineage from James I;

Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de (1707–1788): French naturalist;

Burnet, Gilbert (1643–1715): a Whig Church of England bishop of Scottish birth who wrote a much-cited *History of His Own Time* (2 vols.; London, 1724, 1734);

Cabal(s):; spirit of

Caballers, literary:

Caisse d'Eglise:

Caisse d'Escompte:

Calculators:

Calonne, Charles-Alexandre de (1734–1802): Controller General of French Finances just before the revolution;

Calvin, John (1509–1564): major French Protestant theologian;

Camus, Armand-Gaston (1740–1804): member of the French National Assembly whose speech is quoted by Burke;

Canada:

Canterbury, Archbishop of:

Canton(s): smallest local governmental units created by the National Assembly;

Capital (financial):

Capulets: one of the families in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet;

Carthusian monk: member of an austere French religious order;
Catiline (108–62 B.C.E.): leader of a rebellion against the late Roman Republic whom Cicero defeated and portrayed as a traitor;
Cato the Elder (234–149 B.C.E): austere statesman of the Roman Republic who demanded the destruction of Carthage, Rome's rival in North Africa;
Caution, spirit of:
Cavaliers:
Cethegus (d. 62 B.C.E.): fellow conspirator with Catiline against the ancient Roman Republic;
Champs de Mars: a public field or park in Paris where revolutionary religious festivals were held; today the site of the Eiffel Tower;
Chance, gifts of:
Change Alley: site of London financial dealings;
Charity:
Charles I (1600–1649): English monarch whose policies brought on the English Civil War during which he was executed;
Charles IX (1550–1574): French monarch at the time of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of French Protestants;
Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718): Swedish monarch who carried his nation into wars with other powers around the Baltic Sea;
Chatelet, court of:
Chivalry, age of:
Choiseul, Étienne-François, Duc de (1719–1785): Louis XV's minister of foreign affairs, largely responsible for French participation in the Seven Years' War;
Christian politicians:
Christian religion:
Christina (1626–1689): Queen of Sweden;
Chubb, Thomas (1679–1747): author of deist works;
Church:
Church establishment(s): *See* Establishment(s), ecclesiastical
Church lands:
Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.): Roman politician, orator, and philosopher of the late Roman Republic;

Circean liberty: reference to the experience of Odysseus on the isle of the witch Circe, under whose spell Odysseus and his men remain on the island;

Circulation (money):

Circumstance(s):

Citizen(s):

Civic education: French revolutionary education designed to teach the duties of citizenship outside any religious context;

Civil: confusion; freedom; fury; government; institutions; life; order; power; social man; society; troubles; war

Clan of the enlightened:

Clergy:

Clowns:

Club(s):

Clubhouses:

Coffeehouses:

Coke, Sir Edward (1552–1634): chief justice of king's bench and champion of common law under James I and Charles I;

Colignis: refers to Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572), Protestant leader during the French religious wars of the late sixteenth century;

Collins, Anthony (1676–1729): author of deist works and a volume on freethinking;

Colonies:; military; of the rights of man

Comedians:

Comedy:

Comitia, comices: democratic assemblies of the Roman Republic;

Command, spirit of:

Commendatory abbots: either a cleric or layman drawing income from an abbey, but having no authority over it;

Commerce:

Common law of Europe:

Commons, House of:

Commonwealth(s):; science of constructing

Commune(s): French administrative district between a Department and a Canton;

Competence: abstract; moral
Compounders: in politics
Condés: refers to Louis II de Bourbon (1621–1686), Prince de Condé, who was a leader against the French monarchy during the mid-seventeenth-century aristocratic rebellion known as the Fronde;
Confiscation(s):
Confiscators:
Conquest, country of:
Conservation:
Constitution:; ancient; arithmetical; fixed; free; geometrical; litigious; medicine of the; moral of the heart; new; old-fashioned; paternal; provident; of a republic; spirit of; stock-jobbing
Constitutional Society: *See* Society for Constitutional Information
Constitution-mongers:
Contract:
Contrivance(s):; by ballot; of delight; of human reason; of man; of mercantile fraud; of our reason
Corinthian capital: the most elaborate decorated top of an ancient Greek architectural column;
Corneille, Pierre (1606–1684): French tragic dramatist;
Cornwall: English county in the southwest;
Corporate bodies:
Corporation(s):; ancient; ecclesiastical; municipal
Corruption(s):
Counting-house:
Court(s) (judicial):
Credit:
Creditor(s):
Crete, systasis of: *See* Systasis of Crete
Crime(s):
Cromwell, Oliver (1599–1658): Puritan general during the English Civil War and later Lord Protector;
Cruelty(ies):
Curates:
Currency (ies):

Custom(s):

Dealers in stocks and funds:
Debt(s):
Declaration of Right: correctly Declaration of Rights enacted by the Convention Parliament in 1689 to guarantee certain rights upon William and Mary's coming to the English throne;
Deliberation(s):; of calamity
Delirium, spirit of:
Delos: Greek island according to legend secured to the bed of the sea by the goddess Leto or Latona;
Delusion(s):; spirit of
Democracy(ies):; perfect; purely military
Democratists:
Department(s): largest French regional administrative unit created by the National Assembly to replace the historic provinces;
Descent, liberal:; Protestant
Despotism:
Destruction:
Diderot, Denis (1713–1784): French philosophe and editor of the *Encylopedia;*
Dignity:
Discipline:
Disposition(s):
Dissension, spirit of:
Dissenters: Protestant religious groups in England not conforming to the Church of England;
Divine(s):
Doctors:; of the Assembly; reforming; in religion and politics; of the rights of man
Doctrine(s):; empire of; philosophic
Domination:
Dundee, club at: a group in Dundee, Scotland sympathetic to the French Revolution;
Durham, Bishop of:

Duty: first; monitors of our

East India:
Ecclesiastic(s):
Economists:
Education:
Egypt:
Election(s):; spirit of
Elizabeth I (1533–1603): the last Tudor English monarch;
Elizabeth, Princess (1595–1662): daughter of James I, wife of the Elector of the Palatinate, and mother of Sophia, Electress of Hanover;
Eloquence, pulpit:
Empedocles: 5th century B.C.E. Greek philosopher;
Empire of light and reason:
Empiric(s): charlatan
Encyclopedia: multi-volume Enlightenment reference work edited by Denis Diderot with the first volume appearing in 1751;
Enlightened age:
Entail: an entailed inheritance may not be alienated or sold by the person inheriting it but must be passed on, presumably intact or improved, to the next generation;
Enthusiasm:
Enthusiasts:
Equality:; moral; noble
Establishment(s), ecclesiastical:
Estates of the Church:
Euripus: a straight in the Aegean Sea known for its high waves;
Europe:
Evil(s):; election of
Executive officer:
Executive power:
Experience:

Faction(s):; spirit of

Family(ies):; affections; concerns; distinctions; ensigns; settlement(s); splendour; vault; wealth
Fanaticism:; spirit of atheistical; spirit of
Fathers, atheistical:
Fealty: corporate; spirit of
Feeling(s):
Fénelon, François de Salignac de la Mothe (1651–1715): French bishop noted for his eloquence;
Feudal: dignity; offices; spirit of fealty; tenure; titles; tyranny
Financier(s):; philosophic
Flies of a summer:
Flower-de-luce: a brand on the shoulder of a French criminal;
Folly:
Forefathers:
Fraud(s):
Freedom:; abstract plan of; adulatory; civil; compulsory; democratic ideas of; exalted; manly; moral; noble; rational; religious; spirit of

Gabelle(s): French salt tax
Gallican Church:
Gallows:
Gamesters:
Gaming:
Garrick, David (1717–1779): most famous English actor of the eighteenth century;
Gas:
Gascons:
Gauls:
Genealogy(ies):
Generalities: French royal administrative unit
Generation(s):
Generosity:
Genoa:
Gentleman: idea of; spirit of

Gentry:; landed
Geometric: properties
Geometrical: constitution; demonstration; distribution, spirit of
Geometry:
George II (1683–1760): English monarch;
Germany:
Ghosts:
Glorious Revolution: principles of
Glory:
God:
Gods of our economical politicians:
Gordon, Lord George (1751–1793): anti-Catholic agitator responsible for sparking the Gordon Riots of 1780 in reaction to the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 and subsequently imprisoned;
Gospel, political:
Government(s): abstract plan of; ancient constitution, of; civil; democratic; destructive; fabrication of a new; fabricators of; feeble; fidelity of; free; fundamental; ill-constructed system of; mixed and tempered; new experimental; principles of; of reciprocal control; republican; science of; simple
Governor(s):
Greece:
Guardian(s):
Guienne: French province;
Guises: Guise, François, duc de (1520–1563), Guise, Henri, duc de (1550–1588), Guise, Louis II de (1555–1588), Cardinal of Lorraine—leaders of the Roman Catholic party during the French religious wars;

habeas corpus: requirement that cause be given for imprisonment;
Habit(s):
Hamburgh (Hamburg): northern German Baltic port;
Hanoverian line:. *See also* Brunswick line
Hanse-towns: German port cities on the Baltic Sea;
Harmony of the Universe:

Harry the Eighth: Henry VIII (1491–1547), English monarch who instigated the English Reformation;
Heart(s):; sanctuary of the
Heir per capita:
Heir per stirpes:
Helvetius, Claude Adrien (1715–1771): French philosophe;
Henry I (1068–1135): English monarch;
Henry IV (1553–1610): leader of French Protestants who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1589 in order to become king of France; assassinated in 1610;
Henry of Navarre: *See* Henry IV
Herald's college: English corporate body having the right to determine the ranks of nobility that persons are entitled to carry by virtue of their genealogy;
History:
Holland, Sir Henry Rich, Earl of (1590–1649): a former favorite of James I who turned against Charles I in 1642 at the outbreak of the English Civil War;
Horror(s):
House of Commons: *See* Commons, House of
House of Lords: *See* Lords, House of
House of Peers: House of Lords in the English Parliament;
Human nature:
Humanity:
Hume, David (1711–1776): Scottish philosopher and historian;
Hypocrisy:

Ignorance:
Imagination:
Impeachment:
Impiety:
Imposition(s):
Impostures:
Improvement(s):
Independence:

India:
Indigence:
Indignation:
Individuality:; dust and powder of
Indulgences:
Industry:
Inequality:
Infamy:
Infidelity:
Infidels:
Inheritance:
Iniquity:
Injustice:
Innovation:; spirit of
Insects of the hour:
Insolence:
Insolvency:
Institution(s):
Insult(s):
Intendants: regional officials of the French monarchy;
Interest(s):. *See also* Landed interest; Monied interest
Intolerance:
Intrigue(s):; spirit of
Invention(s):
Io Paean: a triumphant song;
Irreligion:
Italy:

Jacobins: most prominent radical party in the French Revolution;
James I (1566–1625): James VI of Scotland, who in 1603 became the first Stuart English monarch;
James II (1633–1701): English monarch deposed by the Revolution of 1688;
Janissaries: elite Turkish troops;

Jealousy:
Jew broker:
Jews:
Jobbers:. *See also* Money-jobbers
Jobbing:. *See also* Money-jobbers, Money-jobbing
John I (1167–1216): English monarch forced in 1215 to sign the Magna Charta;
Joint Stock:
Judaism:
Judges:
Judicature:
Jurisprudence:
Jus retractus:
Justice:
Justicia of Arragon:

King of France, French King:
King(s): in the sense of kingship
Kingdom, universal:
Kingdoms, regeneration of:
Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance:
Knowledge:

Laborde, Jean Joseph, Marquis de (1724–1794): French banker executed during the reign of terror;
LaFayette, Marie-Joseph Gilbert Motier, Marquis de (1757–1834): French noble who aided American Revolution and became the early commander of the French National Guard;
Land bank:
Landed circulation:
Landed estates:; men of
Landed interest:
Landed property:
Landholders:

Lands, church:
Land-tax:
Languedoc: French provence;
Laputa: a land visited by Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in which abstract thinking dominates the population with most impractical results;
Latonian kindness: refers to the goddess Latona securing the island of Delos to the bed of the sea;
Law, John (1671–1729): Scottish speculator who as a minister of France was responsible for the Mississippi Bubble;
Law(s):; common; common of Europe; eternal, immutable; fundamental; of laws; of nations; of nature; positive; rule of; of social union; statute
Lawgiver(s):
Lawyers:
Lay-divines:
Learning:
Legislative body:
Legislator(s):
Legislature:
Lese (leze) nation:
Lessons, moral:
Letters, modern:
Levanter: refers to a storm in the Mediterranean rising from the east;
Libellers, atheistic:
Liberal descent:
Liberality:
Liberty (ies):; in the abstract; Circean; civil; constitutional; false show of; general; guiltless; ideas of; improved; manly, moral, regulated; new of France; rational; spirit of; system of; tranquil and prosperous
Licentiousness:
Light(s):; empire of; false; men of; of the world
Lisle, Generality of: French royal administrative district;
Literary men:
Literary monopoly:
Literature:

Logician:
London:
London Tavern:
Lords, House of:
Lorraine, Louis II de Guise (1555–1588), Cardinal of: leader of Catholics in French religious wars;
Louis XI (1423–1483): French monarch;
Louis XIII (1601–1643): French monarch;
Louis XIV (1638–1715): French monarch under whom absolutist rule reached its high point;
Louis XV (1710–1774): French monarch;
Louis XVI (1754–1793): French monarch at the outbreak of the French Revolution, executed in 1793;
Louvois, François Michelle Tellier, Marquis de (1641–1691): French war minister;
Lower orders:
Loyalty:
Lucan (39–65 C. E.): Roman poet;
Lust:
Luxury:
Lyons: French city;

Macedon: ancient Greek kingdom of Macedonia;

Machiavellian: adjective referring to early sixteenth-century Florentine political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), noted for his admonitions for the use of harsh political power;

Machine:

Madness:

Magistrate(s):

Magna Charta: the Great Charter granted to the barons under duress by King John in 1215 providing for certain rights;

Malabar: southwest coast of India;

Mamelukes: military rulers of Egypt and Syria between approximately 1200 and 1600;

Mankind:

Manners:; revolution in

Manufactures:

Marie Antoinette (1755–1793): Austrian princess who became the wife of Louis XVI of France and who was executed during the Revolution;

Marius (155?-86 B. C. E): Roman general who challenged the institutions of the Roman Republic;

Mark of silver: a monetary unit equivalent to 224 grams of silver used as a voter qualification that limited the French electorate to approximately 50,000 persons;

Maroon slaves: escaped slaves living in Jamaica;

Mary I (1516–1558): English Tudor monarch, reigning 1553–1558, who attempted to return England to the Roman Catholic Church;

Mary II (1662–1694): daughter of James II and wife of William III, who became joint monarch of England in 1689 as a result of the Revolution of 1688;

Massacre(s):

Masses:

Maxims:

Mazarin, Jules Cardinal (1602–1661): French minister who governed France during the youth of Louis XIV;

Mechanic philosophy:

Mechanism of politic benevolence:
Medicine:; of the state
Men: of political letters; of quality; of talent; of theory
Mercy:
Mess-Johns:
Metaphysic: arithmeticians; declarations; knight; principles; propositions; rights; sophistry
Metaphysical: abstraction; legislators
Metaphysician(s):
Metaphysics:; adulterated; judicial; political; professor of
Mississippi Bubble: French financial scandal of 1720;
Mob:
Moderation:; spirit of
Monaldeschi, Giovanni Rinaldo, Marquis (d. 1657): Italian courtier of Queen Christiana of Sweden, whom she had assassinated;
Money:
Money dealer:
Money-jobbers:
Money-jobbery: spirit of
Monied circulation:
Monied interest(s):
Monk(s):; spirit of
Monster of a constitution:
Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, Baron de (1689–1755): most important political philosopher of the French Enlightenment, author of *Spirit of the Laws* (1747);
Montmorin-Saint-Herem, Armand-Marc, Comte de (1745–1792): French diplomat and former minister of Foreign Affairs active in the early revolutionary government but murdered by mob violence during the September Massacres of 1792;
Moral: causes; conditions; imagination; opinions, revolution in; sentiments; virtues; world
Morality:; masculine
Morals:; liberal and manly
Morangis, Abbé: an unknown person;

Morgan, Thomas (d. 1743): author of deist works;
Multitude, swinish:
Municipalities:
Münster:
Murder(s):

Nancy, Bishop of (Anne-Louis-Henri de la Fare, 1752–1829): defended the French Roman Catholic Church and clergy in the National Assembly and later fled France;
National Assembly: formed in June 1789 by the transformation of the Estates General; later took the name National Constituent Assembly, but Burke always referred to it as the National Assembly;
Natural: course of things; discipline; equality; landed interest; law; right; rights; sense of right and wrong; subordination, principles of
Nature: aristocratic; common feelings of; conformity to; first law of; following; gifts of; high road of; human; indulgence of; law(s) of; of man; method of; pattern of; plastic; prerogatives of; revolution in; second; specimens of; of things; at war with
Navy:
Nayres: a cast of warriors in India assumed to be associated with illegal behavior;
Necker, Jacques (1732–1804): Swiss banker who served as French minister of finance from 1776 to 1781, was recalled just before the Revolution, and served briefly during the Revolution. There was much controversy about the financial figures he presented to the government;
Nero (37–68 C. E.): most notorious of Roman emperors;
Newgate: London prison;
Noailles, Louis-Marie d'Ayen, vicomte de (1756–1804): noble who presented the motion to surrender feudal dues in the National Assembly in August 1789 but later took refuge in England;
Nobility:; spirit of
Noblesse:
Normans:
Numa (715–672 B.C.E.): ancient Roman king and religious leader;
Numeraire: French term for monetary coinage;

Nuns:

Obedience:
Officers:
Old Jewry: the Presbyterian meetinghouse where Richard Price delivered his
Discourse on the Love of Our Country to the Revolution Society in November 1789;
oligarchy: government with very few people in authority;
Onondaga: location of a Jesuit missionary settlement in North America;
Opinions:
Oppression:
Orange, Prince of: Dutch prince who became William III as a result of the Revolution of 1688;
Order:
Orders:; lower; monastic
Ordinary of Newgate: chaplain to those condemned to death in Newgate Prison;
Orgies: *See* Theban and Thracian orgies
Orsini: a family living in early modern Rome associated with political tumult;

Palais Royal: a square in central Paris with numerous shops and wide open space;
Paper:; amulets; circulation; coinage; currency; depreciated; market of; money; new church; pills; Scotch; securities; wealth. *See* also Bank-paper
Paris:; archbishop of; republic of
Parliament (British):; Long
Parliament of Paris (Parlement de Paris): the aristocratically dominated court in Paris which with other French aristocratic institutions had forced Louis XVI to call the Estates General;
Parliaments (Parlements): aristocratically dominated French courts;
Parnassus: Greek mountain sacred to Apollo;

Parochial clergy: clergy working in parishes, normally without ecclesiastical titles;

Parricide: murder of parent or other close relative;

Partnership:

Party(ies):; rage; spirit; tyranny

Passions:

Patkul, Johan Reinhold (1660–1707): Livonian leader betrayed by the Poles to Charles XII of Sweden, who executed him;

Peasant(s):

Pension(s):

People, the:; of England; of France

Perfection(s):; abstract

Persia:

Personal identity:

Persons of quality:

Peters, Rev. Hugh (1598–1660): Puritan army chaplain during the English Civil War who favored execution of Charles I, supported Cromwell, and was executed at the Restoration;

Petition of Right: Parliamentary petition of 1628 to Charles I to grant specific rights to Parliament regarding taxation and imprisonment of subjects;

Philosopher(s):; dogmatism of; intriguing; nation of; pretended of the hour

Philosophic: cabal calling itself; doctrines of personal identity; financiers; purchasers; revolution; spoiler; synod; system

Philosophic analogy: spirit of

Philosophical: fanatics; public credit

Philosophy:; barbarous; coxcombs of; false and unfeeling; licentious; mechanic; sordid and degraded; Stoic; of this enlightened age

Physician of the state:

Picards:

Piety:

Pisgah: the mountain from which, according to the Hebrew Bible, Moses looked into the promised land, which he would not be allowed to enter, and then died;

Pitt, William (the elder) (1708–1778), First Earl of Chatham: British statesman sympathetic to the American colonies and the prime minister who oversaw British victory in the Seven Years' War;

Platoon:

Plunder:

Poet(s):

Poland, Confederation of: an uncertain reference that may have referred to the loosely organized government of Poland before the first partition in 1772 or an association of Polish Roman Catholic nobles formed in 1767 against Protestants and Orthodox Christians in Poland;

Police:

Politeness, revolution in ideas of:

Political monsters:

Politician(s):; Christian; economical; Machiavellian; moral; theological

Politics: doctors in; spiritual doctors of

Poor, the:

Posterity:

Poverty:

Power(s), arbitrary:

Preacher(s):; political

Prejudice(s):

Prerogative(s):; of nature

Prescription, doctrine of: the assumption that the legal possessor of a property for a long period of time or from time immemorial should continue to possess it;

Pretexts:

Price, Dr. Richard (1723–1791): Unitarian minister associated with radical reform movements, who published prolifically on numerous political and economic issues;

Pride:

Priests:

Primary Assembly(ies):

Primary Elector(s):

Principle(s): abstract; democratic; leveling; rebels from

Projectors:

Property:; revolution in
Proselytism, spirit of:
Prosperity:
Providence:
Prudence:; first of all virtues
Public: affairs; affections; concerns; councils; credit; debt(s); economy; estate; faith; force; good; justice; mind; order; representative; revenue; spirit; tranquility
Pulpit(s):; eloquence
Purchase: a device used by workmen to increase their leverage or other mechanical advantage;

Rabbin: rabbi
Rank(s):
Rapacity:
Rapes:
Rapine:
Reason: collected of ages; empire of; feeble contrivances of our; naked; political; private stock of; sophistic; world of
Rebels from principle:
Reform:; spirit of
Reformation:
Reforming doctors:
Regicide: murder or murderer of a king;
Religion:; doctors in; spirit of
Religious animal:
Representation:
Representative(s):
Republic(s):; of Berne; of Paris; of Rome
Research, Committee of:
Restoration: refers to the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660 following the Puritan commonwealth under Cromwell;
Revenue:
Reverence:

Revolution of 1688: revolution deposing James I, bringing William and Mary to the English throne, and providing for a Declaration of Rights and an act of religious toleration;
Revolution(s),; philosophic; in ideas of politeness; politics of; in property; in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions; Society for; in the state; total; when to be contemplated
Revolution Society: society organized by English Protestant Dissenters with the full name "A Society for Commemorating the Glorious Revolution"; originally a social organization that by the late 1780s had become more politically active in the cause of relieving Dissenters' civil disabilities;
Rich, the:
Richelieu, Armand-Jean de Plessis, Cardinal de (1585–1642): advisor to Louis XIII and virtual ruler of France;
Right and wrong: standard of
Rights of man:; assembly of; professors of
Robber(s):
Robbery(ies):
Rochefoucault, Cardinal Dominque de la (1712–1800): opponent of anti-clerical measures of the National Assembly who later took political refuge in England;
Rochefoucault d'Enville, Louis-Alexandre, Duke de la (1744–1792): French reformer under the monarchy, later killed by a French mob;
Roman servitude:
Romans:
Rome:
Rouen, Archbishop of:
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–1778): French philosophe best known for his radical social and political criticism;
Ruins:
Rule(s): abstract; fundamental; of life; positive of doctrine and practice

Sacrilege:
St. Bartholomew Day massacre: massacre of French Protestants in 1572 by French Roman Catholics;

St. Denis: town near Paris with the cathedral where the French kings are buried;

St. Simon, Louis de Rouvroy, Duke de (1675–1755): wrote famous memoirs of the French royal court;

Scheme(s):

School: of moral sentiments; of the rights of men; for sophistry

Science:; of constructing a commonwealth; experimental; of government; of jurisprudence; practical; of speculative and practical finance; theoretic

Scotland:

Second nature:

Secondary electors:

Securities, paper:

Security:

Sedition:

Seekers: radical mid-seventeenth-century Protestant sect seeking to refound the true Christian church;

Selden, John (1584–1654): English jurist;

Self-government:

Senate: in Burke's context a second legislative chamber which could reconsider the work of a lower legislative chamber;

Sensibility:

Sentiment(s):; inbred;; manly; moral; of morality and religion; religious; revolution in; romantic; school of moral; swelling of liberty

Sermon(s):; political

Servant of the People:

Servitude:; Roman

Servius Tullius (578–534 B.C.E): legendary king of Rome;

Siddons, Sara (1755–1831): famed eighteenth-century English actress;

Sieyès, Abbé Joseph Emmanuel (1748–1836): French priest, member of the Third Estate in the Estates General, and author of the pamphlet *What Is the Third Estate?*;

Slaughter(s):

Slavery:

Sloth:

Social union, law of:

Societies:
Society:; civil; as intergenerational contract; primeval contract of eternal
Society for Constitutional Information: society founded in 1780 to encourage the reform of Parliament;
Soldiers:
Solemn League and Covenant: document of 1643 pledging to reform radically the Church of England to a more fully Protestant communion, agreed to by Parliament as the price of gaining Scottish support against Charles I;
Solons: reference to ancient Athenian lawgiver;
Somers, John, First Baron Somers (1651–1716): regarded as the major figure forging the constitutional settlement of the Revolution of 1688;
Sophia, Electress (1630–1714): the granddaughter of James I, who through marriage became Electress of Hanover, and the person through whom the English royal line was drawn by the Act of Settlement of 1701 providing for the throne to go to the house of Hanover at the death of Queen Anne, who was survived by none of her children;
Sophisters:
Sophistry:
South Sea (Bubble): early-eighteenth century English financial scandal;
Sovereign(s):; of sovereigns; of the world
Sovereignty:; collective; intellectual
Spain:
Spectacle(s):
Speculations(s):; men of
Speculatists:
Spirit: of arithmetical arrangment; of the Assembly; of atheistical fanaticism; of cabals; of caution; of command; of the constitution; of controversy; of delirium; of delusion; of dissension; of election; of faction; of fanaticism; of fealty; of freedom; of a gentleman; of geometrical constitution; of the House of Commons; of innovation; of intrigue; of liberty; of moderation; of money-jobbery; of a monk; of nobility; of our constitution; of philosophic analogy; of proselytism; of rational liberty; of reform; of religion; of revenge; of subordination; of toleration
Spoils, philosophic:

Standard of right and wrong:
Stanhope, Charles, Third Earl of (1753–1816): Whig opposed to English war against America, favoring parliamentary reform and relief of Dissenters' religious disabilities, chaired the November 1789 meeting of the Revolution Society; an early critic of Burke's *Reflections;*
State: fabric of; medicine of; multifarious thing called a; oblation of; original compact of; physician of; ransom of; revolution in
States-General of France: Estates General called in 1788 not having met since 1613;
Statesman:; standard of a
Statesmen:; Christian
Stoic philosophy: ancient philosophy urging restraint over the passions and resignation in the face of the difficulties of life;
Succession (in regard to English monarchy):
Sulla (138–78 B. C. E.): Roman general and political figure who challenged the institutions of the Roman Republic;
Sully, Maximilien de Béthune, Duke of (1559–1641): chief minister to Henry IV of France;
Superstition(s):
Supreme Director of the great drama:
Surveyors, state:
Swinish multitude:
Switzerland:
Sword, men of:
Sycophant(s):
Syllogism:
Systasis of Crete: an alliance of ancient Cretan cities formed among former foes against an external enemy;
System(s):; of authority; of a free constitution; of government; of landed property; of leveling; of liberty; of literary monopoly; of manners; mixed; of piety; political; of public economy; of a republic; of revenue; of taxation

Tacitus (55?-117? C. E.): Roman historian;

Tahmas Kouli Khân-Nadir Shah: brutal conqueror of Persia in the second quarter of the eighteenth century;
Talents:
Talmud: Jewish law
Taste:
Taxes, taxation:
Teachers:
Temperament(s):
Tenure, feudal:
Territory:
Terror(s):
Theatre:
Theban and Thracian orgies: ancient orgies in honor of Dionysis;
Theft:
Theologians, political:
Theoretic, experimental edifice:
Theoretic science:
Theoretic system:
Theorists:
Theory(ies):; men of
Third Estate. *See* Tiers Etat
Throne(s):
Tiers Etat:
Ties, rational and natural:
Tindal, Matthew (1657–1733): author of deist works;
Title(s):
Toland, John (1670–1722): author of deist works;
Toleration:
Tories: when Burke wrote, this term meant little more than a position of supposed oversupport for the monarchy;
Total Revolution:
Tour du Pin, Jean-Frédéric, Comte de La (1727–1794): French minister of War during the first year of the revolutionary government; later executed during the reign of Terror;

Trade:
Traders:
Trades:
Traitors:
Tranquillity, public:
Transmission, principle of:
Treachery:
Treason(s):; against property
Treasury:
Tribunal(s):
Troops:
Trust:
Turkey:
Twentieth penny: French tax on income derived from land;
Tyrannicide: murder or muderer of a tyrant;
Tyranny(ies):
Tyrant(s):

Understanding(s):
Unity:
Universe, harmony of the:
Usage(s):
Usurers:
Usurpation(s):
Usurper(s):
Usury:

Vernier, Théodore, Comte de Monte-Orient (1731–1818): author of report on French finances;
Versailles: site of the French royal palace outside Paris;
Vice(s):
Victors:
Violence(s):
Virtue(s):

Vitelli: a group of mercenaries in early modern Italy;
Voltaire: born François Marie Arouet (1694–1778), French philosophe known for his social and religious criticism;
Vulgar, the:

Wants, human:
War(s):
Wealth:
Westminister Hall: site of the English law courts in the eighteenth century;
Whig principles: an ill-defined term often adopted by late eighteenth-century English radical reformers to indicate the idea of an ongoing reform of political structures extending the principles of toleration and parliamentary supremacy growing out of the Revolution of 1688;
Wickedness:
Will:; of the people
William III (1650–1702): Dutch Prince of Orange who in 1789 became, along with his wife, Mary, the joint English monarch as a result of the Revolution of 1688;
Winchester, bishop of:
Wisdom:
World, moral:
World, natural:
Writers:

Zeal:

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